OCPD

[A Psychiatric Novel]

By
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DEDICATION

To the five esteemed medical professionals:

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Assistant Professor Dr. Nasim Jahan, MBBS, FCPS (Psychiatry), BIRDEM
Dr. Md. Raisul Islam Parag, MBBS, BCS (Health), MD (Psychiatry), Registrar, DMCH
Psychologist Tania Hasan, MSc (Psychology), PhD (Psychology), Sydney
— Under whose compassionate care, thousands of individuals battling mental illness are finding their way back to health and hope.

FOREWORD

My essay titled "OCPD", published in 2022 in Bangladesh, was an exact Bengali translation of the complete English article taken from Wikipedia. Since the original article was written in a highly advanced form of English, the Bengali translation was also of a high standard. Consequently, it was not easily readable for all segments of the audience. Furthermore, although the original article was written with an internationally recognized structure, it did not include a case study of an afflicted individual.

To fill these gaps, it seemed essential to create an easily understandable portrayal of a character with OCPD (Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder.

The main objective of art and literature is to make human life beautiful and beneficial. The novel is one of its primary mediums. We find various internationally recognized classifications for novels, such as social, historical, psychological, political, detective, mystery, autobiographical, heroic, poetic, philosophical, allegorical, regional, humorous, stream of consciousness, mythological, and epistolary novels.

However, I humbly leave the decision regarding which category/ genre the OCPD novel truly falls into to the kind readers and critics. But I opine, this psychiatric novel is a Roman-à-Clef (Locked Novel).

My immense gratitude goes to Mr. Ashraful Islam Tushar, the young publisher of Anuj Prokashon [in Bengali: Junior Publication] & chief executive of Asia Publications, BD; who published this novel in Bengali first in Ekushey Boimela 2024.

My childhood friend, writer, and poet Ashraf Mithu, MSc (Psychology) has blessed me with his affection by revising and polishing the text for the front and back folds of this novel, despite his immense busyness. Moreover, my deep affection and thank go to one of my disciples and translator of several languages and popular author Mrs. Ferdous Jahan Refa, who has read this English typing within unbelievable short time!

In the first edition of almost every book, 'unintentional printing errors'—famously known as the 'printer's devil'—tend to appear! If any such mistakes catch the eye of a kind reader, I hope to be rid of that 'ghost' by correcting them in the next edition!
— The Author

INTRODUCTION TO OCPD

OCPD, or Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder, is a 'Cluster-C' personality disorder characterized by three primary symptoms:

1) An abnormal need for adornment (decoration/styling),
2) Extreme orderliness (tidiness), and
3) The overwhelming presence of perfectionism.

"Abnormal Need for Beautification" refers to actions where the affected individual makes desperate efforts to keep themselves and their surroundings decorated to an unusual degree.

Example: I have known an educated, beautiful woman in my neighborhood for the last 10 years. She rarely leaves her house during the day. She only steps out after dusk—accompanied by her maid, her 12-13-year-old son, or her husband. What’s striking is her makeup; it is so intense that even in the dim streetlights, her powder, eyeliner, eyeshadow, and lipstick glow vividly. She isn't going to a party or a wedding; she is simply walking to the local market just a quarter-mile away!

"Orderliness" is the behavior where the individual makes an all-out effort to keep their house, furniture, and themselves perfectly arranged at all times. This "spick and span" nature is so intense that it immediately catches everyone's eye.

Example: I have twin nieces who were to stop their studies after starting college due to financial hardship. However, even 4 or 5 years after quitting school, they kept their study table so tidy it looked like they were still regular students! If someone placed even a pair of glasses on that table, they would swoop in like a hawk to move it. If a row of books was slightly touched or a single book shifted, they would immediately start reorganizing the entire row from scratch.

Their house was in a district town—a simple tin-shed or semi-brick structure. But due to their financial crisis, they couldn't afford to cement the floors of their three-room house. Consequently, they kept the dirt floors smeared with mud, much like traditional village homes.

They would have their younger brothers collect fine, pitch-black clay from a nearby pond or ditch. Every few days, they would smear the floors so smoothly that they looked as if they had been plastered with cement. If someone dropped even a tiny scrap of paper or a few drops of water on that floor, they would re-sweep the entire room or re-smear a large area just to "fix" those few drops!

This trait of Orderliness can also be applied to oneself.

Examples: Repeatedly checking if both sleeves of a new dress are exactly the same length; scrutinizing oneself in the mirror to ensure a garment fits perfectly to the millimeter; or tucking in a shirt and obsessively checking in the mirror if the folds are perfectly symmetrical all the way around.

"The Overwhelming Presence of Perfectionism" is a trait where the affected individual is never satisfied with their work. They are overwhelmed by the constant thought that their task isn't "perfect" enough.

Examples: Hanging a clothesline indoors but using a ruler to check if it is perfectly parallel to the wall; writing a letter but tearing it up and starting over because the lines aren't perfectly straight; or binding a notebook and using a compass to measure, if the distance between the three thread holes is mathematically precise.

These symptoms usually manifest during youth and surface during various critical or stressful life situations. Individuals who have a history of intense pressure—marked by sorrow, hardship, ups and

downs, frustration, depression, or a sense of emptiness—are the ones in whom OCPD symptoms tend to emerge.

The novel OCPD is actually a Psychiatric Case History! I have just highlighted various events and situations spanning fifty years of a crisis-filled real-life-scenario. This allows you, the reader, to see a clear and complete picture of an OCPD character.

1

Mamun was born in 1974 on College Road, Gaibandha[1]. He was the youngest of ten children—five brothers and five sisters. His father was a mother (a lawyer's assistant), and his mother, a homemaker.

Mamun's first memory of his father was of a handsome, sturdy old man with a medium build, a flowing white beard, and fair skin. He was always clad in solid-colored, loose-fitting white panjabi[2] and pajamas[3]—the very image of a saintly figure. His character was unyielding: honest, devoted, brave, highly competent, and possessed of a captivating presence.

His mother was simple; people often called her foolish. Yet, she was beautiful, meticulous, hardworking, and deeply dedicated to her household. Both parents were exceedingly polite, humble, and social. They were also rigorously devout and disciplined, eating sparingly and working hard. Mamun never once saw them in bed past sunrise, nor did he ever witness them napping during the day—even when they were ill. His father passed away at the age of 111, and his mother at 96. At the time of their deaths, their bodies were completely untouched by chronic ailments.

Life proceeded predictably for the family. The four eldest sisters were married off in their early teenage years. Being beautiful and attending the best government primary school in the district town, they attracted excellent marriage proposals. Among the brothers, only the eldest was married, securing a match with the daughter of a wealthy family in Dhaka.

The crisis began when Mamun was about eight or nine years old.

The eldest brother, a TV technician, had been staying home with his new wife for nearly a month after the wedding. Father was furious. The daughter of a rich family required costly daily provisions, placing an immense burden on the father. One morning, the father began to rebuke his son indirectly over this expense. The eldest brother, enraged, lunged to strike him. It took the combined strength of his elder sister, younger sister, and mother to subdue him.

The women managed to restrain the eldest son, but the father witnessed the entire scene and was deeply, irreversibly hurt.

Meanwhile, Mamun's third eldest brother, a student in the ninth grade, had become embroiled in the local Jasod[4] political party. Almost daily, reports of brawls and disputes were brought to the father to settle. The second eldest brother [Hashem] had also just begun training under the eldest as a technician. He would frequently come home from Dhaka and remain utterly jobless for long periods—once spending six straight months simply lying on a bed in their tin-roofed shed.

Concurrently, Mamun's youngest sister, barely in the sixth grade, began a tumultuous affair with the second brother's stylish friends, sparking further family chaos. Amidst this domestic turbulence, it was suddenly revealed that the second eldest brother had married a beautiful widow with four children in Dhaka. No one in the family or the neighborhood could accept this union, save for the father. The household had devolved into complete disarray.

In the midst of these mounting crises, Mamun one evening witnessed something that astonished him: his mother weeping uncontrollably, like a maniac, in the kitchen—a sight he had never seen before. His two

elder sisters tried desperately to console her, but the mother beat her chest, rained curses upon the father, and repeatedly passed out. Mamun managed to grasp the horrifying truth: his father had taken a second wife!

Adding to the family's woes, Gaibandha was upgraded from a sub-district of Rangpur to a full district. Consequently, many legal cases were transferred from Rangpur[5] to Gaibandha, causing a sharp decline in the father's income. The resulting financial hardship created a major crisis. Mamun, though promoted to the sixth grade, could not enroll in high school because his father could not afford the admission fee. Five months of the school year had already passed.

2

Due to the intense financial strain and domestic turmoil, the eldest brother took Masum (the fourth brother) with him to Dhaka[6]. He then wanted to take Mamun as well. Both boys were highly talented students. Although the mother initially refused, she eventually relented, thinking of their future prospects, and allowed them to go to Dhaka.

Mamun's life in the capital began under even tougher circumstances. They lived in a four-room semi-pucca[7] house on a one and three-quarter katha[8] plot in the lane opposite the graveyard on Mirpur[9] Kalshi[10] Road. The landlord occupied one side, and Mamun’s family rented two rooms on the other. The two rooms Mamun's family rented shared a veranda. Mamun and Masum occupied the room adjacent to it—essentially the sitting area, furnished with a tea-table and four lacquered chairs. At night, these had to be pushed aside to make space for their floor bedding.

The room had no fan, and the mosquitos were ferocious. Their mosquito net was made of densely woven nylon which blocked out all airflow, creating a stifling, near-suffocating heat inside. Masum, being more resilient, managed to sleep. But Mamun, keenly sensitive, found the situation unbearable. He would use his little nephew's infant mosquito net over his chest and face, covering his legs and waist with a thin quilt. Yet, the mosquitos still found their way in, and the heat remained a constant torment. Driven by the suffocating heat, he would leave the veranda door open while sleeping, closing it again before his brother and sister-in-law woke up at dawn. One morning, the sister-in-law caught him and unleashed a torrent of abuse.

Mamun's brother, the electronics technician, could never buy a single fan because of the relentless money crisis—not even over the course of the next five years. The misery of sleepless, sweltering nights made each summer feel like an epoch to Mamun.

To escape the heat, he never slept on the bed. He would frequently wipe the floor, dampening the cloth repeatedly, before setting up his net. He would then feign sleep for a few hours. Once his brother and sister-in-law were soundly asleep, he would stealthily open the room's door, hoping to draw in a breath of air.

During the day, school provided a welcome distraction from the heat, because there are many ceiling fans in the class room! But the dread of the evening heat began the moment the sun set.

Desperate for relief, he regularly watched the 9:00 PM news on BTV[11] (the only channel available then) just to hear the weather forecast, praying for rain. At merely fourteen or fifteen years old, he began compiling a chart of yearly temperature fluctuations—a compulsive attempt to predict and prepare for the coming heat.

Since Mamun's brother was an electronics technician, the house was constantly filled with radios, televisions, and VCD[12] players being repaired. Using a discarded, broken motor from one of these machines, Mamun constructed a small stand fan. It was powered by two large flashlight batteries, each costing three Taka[13]—a significant amount. By scraping together various small coins, he would buy a pair

of batteries. The fan's feeble breeze only reached his face, yet it offered a slight, blessed cooling to his body. Unfortunately, buying batteries every day was an impossibility.

Unlike today, when various small, affordable table fans, hand fans, and toy fans flood the market, the 1980s offered only expensive choices: a ceiling fan costing two thousand Taka or a table fan costing four thousand. Financial hardship compresses the human spirit—it constricts one's lifestyle, speech, thoughts, everything.

The heat exerted such a deep and excruciating influence on Mamun’s life that his days were consumed by one thought, “How will I sleep tonight?” And his weekends by another, “How will I survive this day?”

It was just heat. Everywhere, the oppressive heat, and the glaring, fierce yellow sunlight. The fear of sweating led him to abandon sports and even running.

One night, as he was preparing for bed, his sister-in-law asked Mamun to run an errand to the nearby shop. He started to go, bare-chested and in half-pants. She sternly commanded him to put on a shirt. Mamun simply replied, "I feel hot."

Then, his toddler nephew, who had just learned to walk, insisted on being carried to the shop. Mamun adamantly refused to pick him up; the nephew had to walk, yet he insisted on being held. The sister-in-law, greatly distressed, pleaded with Mamun but could not sway him. Finally, she asked, "What is the problem with carrying him for a moment?"

Mamun, forced to explain his desperate measure, said: "I just bathed to cool my body down. If I carry him now, I'll get hot on the way there and back. It will make it impossible for me to sleep!"

However kind she might have been, she was not his mother. The added burden of two extra mouths in a poor household took its toll. She, too, was naturally under immense mental pressure. Being born in Kolkata[14], she possessed a certain verbal sophistication and sharp wit. Whenever something went wrong, she would sting Mamun with cutting idioms: "His future is dust, the lord of the lazy, where have you hidden it, a clump of uselessness, your parents taught you nothing!"

Mamun's patience grew under this constant verbal assault, but his spirit was curdled by resentment, sorrow, frustration, and depression, leading him to become profoundly introverted.

Five years passed this way. Half a month remained before his SSC exams. It was March, so the suffocating heat had abated somewhat. Yet, Mamun was an intensely focused student. The passion of reading aloud often caused his body to sweat. And it was at that very moment that the next phase began

Then, suddenly, the realization would strike him: “Wait! There is no fan in this room!”

Immediately, the cumulative suffering of the past five years of heat would overwhelm him, leaving him both consumed and furious. One morning, he screamed in frustration: “Enough! I won’t study anymore! I won’t sit for the exam! How can anyone study in this heat? Brother, I’m going home right now!”

His eldest brother rushed in from the next room and instructed his fourth brother Masum: “Go to your second sister-in-law’s place. Go fetch their table fan for a few days!”

The fan arrived. Mamun finished his exams in peace. The results were published. Mamun had passed in the first division[15]! His school friends were all top-tier students, preparing for admission into the nation's Top Ten colleges. Mamun harbored the same ambition. He took one hundred and fifty Taka from his eldest brother, bought the college admission guide "Voyager," and began studying. His friends, meanwhile, were already mobilizing—running between private tutors, local seniors, and school teachers for guidance.

Mamun sat for the entrance exams at Notre Dame, Adamjee Cantonment, and Hermann Gmeiner College—the countries top colleges. He passed only the last one. But the principal summoned his eldest brother as guardian, stating in a grave, firm voice: "Mamun cannot be given Science. His score in Higher Mathematics is below sixty." Mamun, however, was stubborn; he was determined to study Science. Having no other choice, he enrolled at Tejgaon College—beyond top twenty colleges in Dhaka. His heart sank with disappointment—all his friends were attending the most prestigious institutions.

A few months after college classes began, as winter approached, his sister-in-law took her family to her father's home in Savar[16] for a visit. Mamun was left alone in the house. The mental pressure of the sister-in-law was gone—a relief! A month passed, but there was no sign of their return. The eldest brother also stopped coming home at night, working all day in Dhaka and then commuting to Savar. Winter ended, and summer began.

Now, Mamun no longer suffered from the heat. He slept under a ceiling fan!

However, a new set of torments began: loneliness, the burden of work, and hunger. He spent all day at college. In the evening, he returned home to cook for himself—hungry and exhausted. At night, he ate the same meal with a cheerless face. His brother gave him only one hundred Taka[17] a week for groceries, college travel, and small study expenses. It was never enough to last the entire week. After four or five days the weekly allowance would last, just barely. For the remaining one or two days, he would have to wait, sometimes eating only half a meal, sometimes nothing at all, until his brother sent money.

The filament light bulb had been dead for quite some time. He couldn't afford the twenty-two Taka replacement cost, so the room was illuminated only by a dim, green nightlight.

One evening, under that faint green glow, he sat down to eat the vegetable khichuri[18] he had cooked that afternoon. He was eating straight from the cooking pot, skipping the plate to save on washing time and out of sheer fatigue. Suddenly, in the murky green light, he saw a black cockroach shifting and twitching in the middle of the pot. Simultaneously, a sickening crunch sounded in his mouth. He had chewed and crushed the insect!

With profound revulsion, he shuddered, dropped his meal, stood up, spat out the food, and gargled until his throat felt raw. He aggressively rattled the pot under the dim light until the cockroach scrambled out. Only after confirming its absence did he resume eating. What choice did he have? Otherwise, he would go to bed hungry.

Lately, he had been afraid to sleep in total darkness, so he kept the green nightlight on. But tonight, sleep would not come. His mind was tormented by past grief, humiliation, and deprivation, compounded by the current dull, monotonous reality. He hadn't even gotten into a good college. How far could his education

truly take him? The dream of becoming a scientist felt distant. His studies were faltering under the pressure of adversity.

His classmates and friends from high school had already finished the first-year syllabus for mathematics and science. Their lives were a constant bright of activity: group studies with university seniors, college teachers, and top students. And yet, Mamun's daily thought was simply: "How will I get to college tomorrow? I have no money in my pocket; there is no food in the house." Plagued by these problems, he still couldn't grasp the basic concepts of dynamics and calculus.

All these chaotic, conflicting thoughts overheated his mind. Sweat broke out on his body. He felt like he couldn't breathe. The obsessive preoccupation locked onto his brain, and Mamun realized his life was no longer normal like others. He had lost all enthusiasm and spirit.

His high school friend, Lenin, who attended Adamjee Cantonment College, offered a piece of advice: "If you can manage to get a Transfer Letter from the Education Board, then you could transfer from Tejgaon College to Adamjee Cantonment College." The idea immediately took root in Mamun's mind.

His second brother-in-law had a distant uncle, Helal Uddin, a Chemistry teacher at Adamjee College. Mamun accompanied his brother-in-law to meet him. Seeing Mamun's innocent, polite, and studious demeanor, the teacher agreed, "I will try." He instantly provided Mamun with the Principal's recommendation on the application form, written by Mamun himself.

Mamun then spent days navigating the bureaucracy at Tejgaon College before finally failing to get the Principal's signature. He succeeded only after slipping fifty Taka to the Principal's P.A. Armed with the completed application, he began the long journey from Mirpur-12 to the Education Board in Bakhshi Bazar.

Mamun was a regular Namajee (one who prays). Coincidentally, the officer holding his application was also a devout man. One day, Mamun followed him to the mosque for the Zohr[19] prayer and approached him afterward. The officer, impressed by Mamun's commitment to prayer, granted final approval for the Transfer Letter.

Overjoyed, Mamun enrolled in the second year at Adamjee Cantonment College. His enthusiasm and spirit for life were instantly revived.

However, his current living arrangement severely disrupted his studies. All the houses in Mirpur-12 were designed in the same manner: two rooms on one side, three on the other, divided by a narrow central alley. If he opened his door for air, the noise from the neighboring family poured in. If he closed the door to block the sound pollution, the room would become unbearably hot. Mamun resolved to leave and find a better place.

After a lengthy search, Mamun found a single room. It had no sound pollution whatsoever, but it had a major flaw: no gas connection. With no way to cook, he began eating at local restaurants. Three daily meals out soon led to digestive distress—loss of appetite and crippling acidity.

He informed his brother of the problem. In response, his brother arranged for Mamun to eat as a paying guest with the family of a former colleague, a watchman from the "Stuck Pakistani" (Bihari) community.

It was a fifteen-minute walk to the Bihari settlement, and Mamun felt intensely uncomfortable eating there. Consequently, after only a few weeks, he started taking his meals to his residence. He would bring the food back to his own apartment to eat. It was in this manner that his higher secondary examinations began.

One day, he returned home from the exam at half-past three. He was ravenously hungry. As he retrieved his meal from the Bihari settlement, carrying the plates and bowls like a thief, the thought that tormented him was: “What if my friends see me?” His friends, Mithu and Lenin, lived right near the settlement. He was carrying an untimely meal, while Mithu and Lenin had already finished their food after the exam and were comfortably napping!

Mamun sighed, forcing himself to believe: “Inshallah (God willing), this situation will soon change—if I could secure admission into the next BMA Long Course”[20].

He had already taken the army entrance exam using his Higher Secondary admission card. However, lacking any formal attire, he had shown up for the preliminary test wearing a thirty-Taka T-shirt, jeans, and leather sandals. He hadn't realized that the Army sought not just good students, but also a fierce adherence to formal dress and discipline. The selection officers, giving him a mixed reaction regarding his clothes during the interview, told him: "You will come back for the next test in formal attire—we will take you."

At Adamjee Cantonment College, Mamun’s classmates and several lecturers believed he would secure Star Marks[21] in the final higher secondary examination. Observing his rapid progress and sharp intellect, several classmates nicknamed him “Supersonic” (a moniker also given to the French-built Concorde jet).

But when the board exams actually began, he was gripped by panic. He failed to correctly solve several problems in Physics. In Mathematics, he wrote solutions for every single problem, only to realize upon checking them at home that he would score, at most, fifty to sixty points.

What was the reason? He realized he had studied intensely, but his inability to engage in uninterrupted practice had led to this collapse of memory and application.

The Higher Secondary results were published. He had missed the First Division by a mere fifteen marks. This score would make university admission exceptionally difficult, as the university entrance system added five points from the Secondary exam and ten points from the Higher Secondary results to the final admission test score. Meanwhile, several of his friends from school, who were already even better students than he was, had also slipped into the Second Division due to a slight shortage of marks. Some of them were already preparing for the Improvement Examination. Mamun was paralyzed by indecision: “Should I sit for the exam again? Or should I try to enter university with this score?”

The poor result deeply disappointed Mamun’s eldest brother. His hope was that Mamun would achieve an excellent score and aim for Applied Physics at Dhaka University. The brother now instructed Mamun to vacate the Mirpur apartment and move to Savar. Mamun knew he needed to stay—at least to keep track of the university admission news. In the nineties, there was no internet; no information was online. Students had to rely entirely on their social circles and the daily newspapers.

3

Life became incredibly difficult for Mamun after the move to Savar. It was a lonely existence, devoid of friends. His days were spent wandering aimlessly like a lost youth, sometimes taking his half-age nephew along to spin tops and fly kites. Once or twice a month, he would travel to Mirpur to meet his friends and gather vital information about university admissions.

Two or three friends in Mirpur and the house in Savar belonging to his sister-in-law's father had landline phones, but making calls was expensive. No one easily allowed access.

Suddenly, Mamun found out: The deadline to collect Dhaka University admission forms had passed. He was filled with regret. He had, at least, possessed the marks required to simply collect the form.

A few days later, he managed to buy a Science Faculty admission form from Jahangirnagar University for one hundred Taka. His ambition was to study Physics and Electronics. But as he sat down at home to fill out the form, he noticed a critical requirement: a minimum of fifty percent in Higher Mathematics. Mamun had 48.50%!

He stopped filling out the form and sat frozen for a long time. All dreams of becoming a scientist had evaporated.

In a furious tempest of anger, sorrow, and frustration, he shredded the long blue application form into tiny pieces and carefully discarded them at the base of a flowerpot—a final, desperate gesture, ensuring the form was not disgraced, and preserving the last, fragile possibility of a future.

It was critical for Mamun to gain university admission. At the very least, it would provide him with a secure place to live and eat, and access to good tutoring opportunities. Following his friends' advice, he collected the Arts Faculty admission form this time.

After submitting the form, a few friends bought the entrance exam guide, Shongsoptok[22], for one hundred and fifty Taka. Mamun couldn't afford it. Instead, he simply read the guide's table of contents thoroughly and flipped through the pages to analyze how the answers were structured. This was his only preparation!

On the day of the written exam, he saw that the Philosophy paper was comparatively easier than English or Archaeology. With a cheerful heart, he used every ounce of his skill to fully complete the Philosophy answers and left the hall satisfied. A few months later, the results were published: Mamun had passed!

He arrived at the university for the oral exam feeling light and enthusiastic. Mamun possessed a distinct habit: he would always initiate conversations with everyone and easily mingle. While this trait had some positive outcomes, it would frequently lead to lifelong regret, crushing pain, and disaster. Driven by this inherent nature, he struck up conversations with the other candidates, asking those leaving the room what questions the board had posed. During this interaction, one candidate asked for his pen.

Shortly after, Mamun's name was called. He quickly looked around for the person he'd lent his pen to but couldn't find him! He entered the viva board empty-handed.

One professor frowned and stated: "You scored less than fifty in Mathematics. You need to be very good at Math to study Philosophy!"

Mamun smiled and replied: "I have read quite a few Philosophy books of the Honors level as a hobby, and I didn't find much use for mathematics there. But if it is truly required, I will practice it even better."

After the three professors finished their questions, they asked Mamun to sign the attendance sheet. Mamun apologized and said: "I lent my pen to someone outside to write something. May I use yours?"

The professor scowled and said: "You may not use my pen!"

Mamun, keeping his composure, asked: "Then, may I quickly step out and fetch my own pen for a moment?"

The professor, visibly irritated, retorted: "If you cannot keep a pen with you during an examination, how do you expect to pursue a subject that requires the deep contemplation of Philosophy?" He then angrily handed his own pen to Mamun to sign the attendance sheet.

The results came out a month later. Mamun's name was on the waiting list—a deeply uncertain outcome. His friend, Apu, who had already secured admission into Economics at the same university (Jahangirnagar University), advised him: "Enroll in the B.Sc. Pass Course at Government Bangla College[23]. You'll finish in three years, and then you can complete your Master's while working."

Mamun's self-esteem took a painful hit. Enroll in a Pass Course instead of an Honors program? He agonized over what to do.

He realized there was no longer any reason to stay in Savar; he needed to return to Mirpur. But where would he stay? He discussed his dilemma with his friend Rubel (already got admission in RUET[24]), who, after much searching, managed to arrange a temporary bed in his several friends mess near the Mirpur-12 Post Office, sharing a bed with another resident. The monthly rent was three hundred Taka, with food costing seven hundred.

The crisis began at night. The room had no fan. Mamun was sharing a bed with a mess member named Babul, who was snoring at a terrifying velocity and sweating in equal proportion! The smell of his sweat made the room unbearable. Intermittently, Babul would make groaning noises and throw his arms and legs onto Mamun in his sleep. Mamun woke him up and pushed him away several times, but to no avail.

Babul, the only son of a wealthy landowner from a remote village in Tangail, had successfully gained admission to BUET[25]. He was a happy youth, sleeping soundly and carelessly.

Mamun could not sleep at all. The intense heat triggered a phobia of temperature within him. The fan-less summers of his past life and years of grueling hardship resurfaced in his memory. Yet, next to him slept a simple village boy—unburdened and content. Why? The reason was singular: a shining future awaited him. He would soon be an engineer, owning a house, a car, and a beautiful wife in Dhaka—a future he openly boasted about to his mess mates during the day.

4

Mamun passed the Preliminary Examination for the Second Lieutenant position this time. He and several friends—some of whom had already started university classes—studied intensely for the written exam. He passed that too. The final test was now the ISSB[26].

He was required to stay at the Dhaka Cantonment for four days. This demanded two pairs of white T-shirts, half-pants, and white shoes. Even buying these from the New Market footpath would cost around five hundred Taka. But, his pocket was completely empty!

The evening before he was due to report to the Cantonment, Mamun rushed to Mirpur Section-2, under the pretext of tutoring, to ask the students' father for an advance. After the lesson ended, around 8:30 PM, the father of Mumu and Babu came home. Mamun explained his situation. The man was astonished and delighted, but scolded him good-naturedly: "You should have told me this a few days ago! Tonight, you should be preparing for your exam. The IQ test[27] of ISSB is very tough."

With seven hundred Taka in advanced tuition fees tucked into his pocket—secured under the harsh yellow glow of a neon light—Mamun raced towards New Market[28] via alternative transport, all the while thinking: "My friends were comfortably preparing for the ISSB at home; he was preparing his uniform! Financial scarcity severely compromises opportunities. Only those who can overcome these hurdles through extraordinary means achieve success in life."

He returned to the mess around midnight with his purchases. He immediately washed the two scratchy, starched cotton half-pants, or else they would puff out when worn, making him look ridiculously like a British-era policeman in shorts!

After falling asleep at 1:00 AM, waking up at 6:00 AM was excruciating. He reached the Cantonment without eating breakfast. After confirming his attendance, he was grouped with fifty candidates and immediately forced to march at a rapid pace from one end of the Cantonment to the other for a solid hour. The entire walk was inside the grounds, making it impossible to grasp from the outside how vast the Cantonment area actually was. The route traversed numerous army buildings, fields, ponds, and patches of jungle—it was an unfamiliar world, indeed!

Sweaty and exhausted, the candidates were finally seated in a large hall by the Army Instructor. No one knew what would happen next. Instantly, two Army officers entered and announced in loud, commanding voices: "Candidates! Leave your baggage at the Army Mess and take your seats in the hall. The General Knowledge and IQ tests will now commence."

While the General Knowledge test went well, the IQ test proved difficult. The pictorial and geometrical puzzles, in particular, were confusing. These required extensive practice, and there was no time for thoughtful deliberation—the clock was unforgiving. Mamun, due to his poverty, had not been able to buy a guide; he had only been able to flip through a few pages lent by friends.

After the exams, everyone was escorted to the soldiers' mess. Their bags were placed in the sleeping quarters, and they were seated in the dining room. They were served breakfast: bread, chickpea curry, and meat. Mamun felt a surge of elation, thinking: "If I pass this final stage, I will never have to struggle for food and shelter again. The rest of my life will be secure!"

After the meal, everyone was led back to the room. The officers then began hanging numbered metal plates around the necks of the successful candidates—the way suspects are photographed at a police station. Those receiving the plates cheered with excitement. Those who waited grew anxious, exchanging nervous glances. Mamun's throat was dry, and his hands and feet were trembling. Lack of sleep, coming to the exam without breakfast, the hour-long forced march, the ninety-minute test, the subsequent hungry meal, the cigarette smoke—everything felt profoundly unnatural!

The plates stopped after about thirty candidates. Mamun was among the fourteen or fifteen who were rejected.

The Army Officer's voice boomed, rattling the tin roof: "Those who did not pass this time, prepare yourselves better! Inshallah (God willing), you will succeed next time. Remember: The first failure is the path to the next success."

The unsuccessful candidates were then brought to the accounting department. There, an officer handed them money for their journey home—an amount determined by the distance of their respective routes, which they had calculated for every single candidate. They had calculated the precise amount by crunching the data gathered from the General Knowledge answer sheets. Mamun walked out of the Cantonment, carrying thirteen Taka and seventy poisha[29], thoroughly dejected.

As the tempo[30] rode past the Police Battalion and through Mirpur-13 from Kochukhet[31], Mamun thought: "It's alright! I will try again." He repeated the mantra in his mind: "The first failure is the path to the next success. The first failure is the path to the next success. The first failure is the path to the next success …"

The bright, dazzling yellow light of the midday sun and gusts of wind swept into the tempo. On the north side of the road, the police uniforms hung from the balconies of the Riot Police Battalion's residential high-rise swayed dramatically in the squalls—just like Mamun's futures sway in the wind of fate!

Mamun knew that right now, he wouldn't feel much worse than his pervasive melancholy. But he was certain that over the next day or two, this blow would consume him, breaking him completely. Despair and depression would utterly overwhelm him until some new motivation entered his life.

5

Mamun's eldest nephew, Faruk, was in his final year at Rangpur Polytechnic Institute. He offered a suggestion: The Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh[32], offered a B.Sc. Engineering course for a minimal fee. The catch: it required a certificate proving two years of practical work experience under an IEB-certified engineer member.

Fortunately, his nephew’s acquaintance, Engr. Russel, was employed in the IEB’s Utility and Maintenance division. Through him, Mamun managed to procure the necessary certificate. He was immensely relieved to finally secure admission into the Electrical Engineering department in B.Sc. for a meager one hundred Taka.

There are no conventional classes at the IEB. Students form groups and study through private tuition paid to IEB member-engineers. The exams are administered by BUET after the stipulated semester deadline.

Mamun calculated his expenses: this study method would require approximately three thousand Taka per month. Where would he find such a vast sum? Tutoring would only bring in one to one-and-a-half thousand to fifteen hundred Taka per month. Thus, it was a non-starter!

He consulted with his eldest brother, who agreed to contribute five hundred Taka monthly. Mamun did not press him, knowing that even this small sum would be a struggle for his brother to maintain. Taking the first month’s five hundred Taka allowance, he immediately purchased a second-hand ceiling fan.

Mamun’s current income was only one tuition job, bringing in seven hundred Taka, plus his brother's five hundred Taka. The mess rent (five hundred) and food bill (seven hundred) consumed the entire twelve hundred Taka. How was he supposed to afford his IEB studies? He didn't even have money for small pocket expenses—tea, snacks, cigarettes. After a few months, his brother, facing his own financial crunch, stopped the five-hundred-Taka contribution entirely. Mamun’s amateur engineering education was indefinitely postponed.

Now, unable to pay his full food bill at the mess, he was forced to cut out one meal: dinner.

Around midnight or 1 AM, when everyone in the three-room mess was asleep, Mamun would creep into the kitchen and secretly eat the remaining rice and curry from the pots, like a thief. Sometimes, there was nothing left at all—just a few scraps on someone's discarded plate—and he would eat that too. The pain of hunger is the most deplorable pain in life!

One night, he found only waterlogged rice (Panta Bhat) in a pot. There were no raw chilies, onions, or garlic. Driven by desperation, he ate the cold, soaked rice with only salt.

The next morning, his senior messmate Shishir complained: "Who ate my Panta Bhat? What am I supposed to eat now?"

Mamun thought: “It's a theft, and of food, no less. Silence won't do.” With a hesitant posture, a flushed face of shame, and a voice tinged with remorse, he confessed: "Shishir Bhai! I was desperately hungry last night, so I ate the Panta." He concealed the fact that he hadn't been eating properly for months due to lack of funds. Shishir laughed it off: "Oh, don't worry about it! It's nothing."

Mamun had always been firmly committed to principles of justice and morality. But desperation corrupts the human character. Occasionally, he would steal small amounts of money—five, ten, sometimes twenty, once a maximum of fifty Taka—from the pockets of a financially secure junior mess member named Russel, whose clothes hung on a rack in the dining area.

This junior, Russel, had come from the provincial town with the singular goal of gaining admission to Dhaka University. Every night, after crisscrossing Dhaka for his preparations, he would return, change out of his pants and shirt, and then visit the rooms of the elder residents to boast of his accomplishments.

Mamun would lie in wait. He would stand by the clothes rack like a brazen thief, handling and shifting the garments with the pretense that he was looking for his own Lungi[33].

A few days later, Russel mentioned to the elder residents, laughing, "My spare change keeps disappearing from my pocket!" This time, Mamun chose silence. He knew that appearing too virtuous was often worse than not.

6

One day, Mamun learned that his father had sold the house of Gaibandha town! Everyone feels a certain attachment, a blend of memory, emotion, and love, for their ancestral birthplace. Mamun rushed home from Dhaka to understand the situation. Now, he didn't even have a physical place to exist in this country. If one could detach the mind from the body, the resulting feeling would be that of a senseless robot—and that is exactly how Mamun felt.

In Gaibandha, he stayed at the home of his second eldest sister, Shefa Bubu. She was the only sister who was financially stable.

The father had finally sold the house for a convergence of reasons: the rampant misbehavior and activities of the third eldest brother, Wasim; the relentless pressure from the youngest brother, Masum, for business money; and the final, desperate attempt to escape the shame of the father's second marriage.

The next afternoon, Mamun went to the home of his eldest sister, Firoza, right next door. Today, his mother and all their furniture were moving to a rented house. He found Firoza Bubu weeping behind the house.

Mamun asked: "Bubu! Why are you crying?"

Wiping her eyes, she pointed with a weak, trembling hand: a bullock cart, carrying all their belongings, was lumbering along the dirt path that led toward Palash Para[34] behind their house.

Mamun asked: "Where is Mother?"

His sister replied: "Masum is busy with his business, Father is in Kamarpara[35] with his second wife, and Mother is at the rented house across from the DC[36] office.

The two members on the extreme ends of a broken, collapsing, and uncertain family—the eldest sister and the youngest brother—stood silently together, watching: In the melancholy and fading light of the late afternoon, the bullock cart...

The cart, listing slightly, moved slowly, kicking up clouds of dust as it disappeared down the distant, winding path toward Palash Para. The two of them—the eldest sister and the youngest brother—stood silently, watching until it vanished from sight.

Six months dragged by. Mamun could not begin his engineering course due to the financial constraint. Desperate, he sold the ceiling fan for three hundred Taka to a friend and traveled to Gaibandha to see his father, hoping to secure a regular, modest monthly allowance.

In the evening, he met his father at his new home in Chapadaha[37] village, an hour's rickshaw ride from his sister's place. After dinner, his father performed his ritual fifteen-minute walk. The new house stood near the main road, though the settlement was sparse. Under the clear blue autumn sky, dotted with white clouds, and illuminated by a fierce, yellow, breaking moonlight, Mamun paced the road with his father.

He searched for the perfect moment to state his need. But he could find no break in his father's relentless, tightly-woven monologue of conversation to raise his own problems. The father's discourse, filled with advice, eventually concluded—but Mamun never managed to ask for the financial help.

The next morning, he met his father at the courthouse for farewell. Masum Bhai was also there. Masum now held half the proceeds from the College Road house sale. He and the third brother were running a rice business. The other half was used to buy a twenty-two decimal[38] plot of land in the remote village of Bhelakopa[39] for the third brother and to mortgage several acres of arable land for income. The father told Masum, "Give Mamun some money for a ceiling fan. And if you can, give him some extra cash now and then." Masum Bhai gave him two thousand Taka for the fan and two hundred Taka for his travel fare.

7

The successful student lives and the bizarre behaviors of the junior mess members filled Mamun with pain, resentment, and depression. A new, skinny, dark-skinned member, Jashim—looking exactly like the younger brother of the famous Bengali actor Jashim[40] —had arrived. Before dawn, while still lying in bed, he would let out a bovine roar, stretching and yawning. This sound routinely shattered Mamun's mid-sleep.

Mamun's precarious educational future and constant financial worry had created a delayed sleep cycle[41], with sleep only arriving around 2:00 or 3:00 AM. He needed to sleep until 10:00 or 11:00 AM to feel functional, making sleep a precious commodity.

One morning, unable to bear the torture, Mamun lost control and ferociously shouted at Jashim! Jashim was equally aggressive. He was the son of a rich man from the char [42] areas of Tangail, and he had gained admission to BUET. He even had a girlfriend in the village who looked like a movie heroine, a photo of whom he proudly showed off, laminated in A4 size, to all the mess members. Mamun wondered: "Why do beautiful girls love such tasteless boys? Is it only because they will become engineers?"

Amidst these dark thoughts, Jashim also erupted, yelling in protest. Mamun, enraged, grabbed a nearby chair and was about to strike him when Babul and Abdullah rushed in from the next room, restraining him.

The matter escalated. Babul soon called in some thug-students from Pallabi[43] for an attack. Babul, Jashim, and Abdullah were all disciples (murids) of the same spiritual leader—all BUET students. They stormed the mess, roaring, and demanded: "Who is Mamun?"

Mamun identified himself in a firm, hard voice. Three or four of them immediately jumped him, hurling unspeakable abuse involving his parents as they delivered rapid blows, slaps, and kicks. Seeing the situation deteriorate, Mamun bolted to the kitchen. With lightning speed, he grabbed a large kitchen knife and stood firm, chest puffed out, ready to retaliate. His roar stopped the attackers dead in their tracks.

Mamun's friend, Firoz, then appeared and stepped between them. The murids, who had been lurking in the shadows, also emerged to stage a forced truce.

Mamun was profoundly disillusioned by the united cunning of these seemingly naive, successful village students. He resolved to leave the mess and return to his childhood neighborhood in Mirpur-12, D-Block. He eventually moved into a rented room owned by Tutul, one of his childhood friends who had become a local gangster. His room contained only a single mattress, and nothing else! A single mattress spread on the floor. There was no fan! Mamun was once again gripped by the phobia of temperature.

But what choice did he have?

Seeing Mamun's dire state, his gangster friends assigned him the task of teaching English to their college-bound younger brothers. Five to seven restless, mischievous students—each paying three hundred Taka. But where would he teach them?

On the west side of the D-Block Eidgah[44] field, next to Shaheed Zia[45] College, there was an NGO-run primary school for Bihari children. Mamun's new students spoke to the school guard and arranged for Mamun to teach them on the benches under the ceiling fan for one hour every day at 3:00 PM.

In the blistering, intense heat of June, he taught diligently. Once the month ended, he would have a large sum, enough to buy a ceiling fan—and finally escape the temperature terror.

After moving to D-Block, his friends helped him secure more tuition jobs from their siblings and relatives. Yet, he still wasn't earning enough to start his IEB engineering course. Three years had passed since he finished high school[46]!

Mamun decided, after deep consideration, that he must become a Lodging Tutor—living and eating at the host family's house. This would secure his basic needs, and once he somehow started his engineering studies, there would be no shortage of good tuition opportunities. He spread his intention among his friends.

Within days, a proposal arrived through his school friend, Pulok. His friend Zia's maternal uncle needed a live-in-tutor for his two young sons. Pulok and Zia were both students of Applied Physics at Dhaka University—their judgment couldn't be poor. Mamun agreed.

Zia escorted Mamun to his uncle's house near the Mirpur-11 bus stand that night. The aunt and uncle were clearly wealthy. They occupied a large flat on the third floor of a five-story building. The two students were clean, polished, and lively. For the first time in a long while, Mamun ate his fill: food rich with bright red gravy meat, fish, eggs, vegetables, mash (bhorta), and dal.

They showed Mamun his separate room, but since he was a guest, Zia and Mamun slept on the cot in the dining room.

It was a winter night. The mosquito net was hung. Mamun, unused to sleeping under a net, felt slightly suffocated. In the light of the blue nightlight, the room's white walls looked blue and celestial in the diffuse glow. The blue light pooled on Zia's small, dark face through the expensive, beige mosquito net. The fellow was sleeping soundly. A happy friend, a bright future—like the dazzling blue light illuminating his face.

Mamun thought: "But what of mine? Can I truly leverage this Lodging to finish my engineering studies?" Hope stirred in his chest. He resolved to use the placement to rejuvenate his health and prepare fiercely for the Army exam again. Sleep refused to come, caught between conflicting anxieties.

Then, Zia's rhythmic nasal roaring began. Mamun woke him several times, instructing him to sleep on his side, but the noise quickly returned. Mamun tried desperately to force himself to sleep.

Suddenly, Zia lunged back and clutched Mamun, beginning a series of thrusting movements in the manner of coitus. Mamun gasped and shot upright. What was happening? He watched closely and realized: no, Zia was doing this entirely in his sleep. Mamun rationalized the outbursts of his growing

friend's subconscious desire. Zia slammed into Mamun several more times. Mamun simply endured the rest of the night!

Zia woke up on time, his need for the university bus shattering Mamun’s light, late-arriving sleep. They had a hearty breakfast and left the house. Zia boarded the red double-decker BRTC[47] bus heading to the university.

It was a cold winter morning. Mamun walked the footpath from Mirpur-11 bus stand to Purabi Cinema Hall, refusing the bus deliberately. The soft, yellow winter sun drenched the surroundings. Diverse professionals rushed to their work. Only Mamun had no specific task. He lit a cigarette outside Purabi Hall. Exhaling smoke, he gazed down Kalshi Road to the East—the very road at the end of which his urban life had begun ten years earlier, in the rented house facing the graveyard, filled with the hope of a better destiny.

Finishing the cigarette, Mamun began walking toward the Mirpur-12 bus stand to meet his friend Eraj. His mind was infused with new enthusiasm, his stride was resolute, his body felt energized, and his thoughts were fortified by determination. Eraj was honest, hardworking, talented, and the son of a wealthy family. He was in his final year of Electrical Engineering at Dhaka Polytechnic, assured Mamun: “Friend, start your IEB studies now. Start a new struggle.”

Mamun asked Eraj to sell his ceiling fan so he could buy some textbooks. Eraj took the twelve-hundred-Taka fan and bought it himself for seven hundred Taka.

Over the last three years, Mamun's routine of tutoring morning, noon, and night, broken up by socializing, had destroyed his habit of staying indoors. The Lodging required him to teach the two students a minimum of two sessions: early morning and evening. Waking up at the crack of dawn was agonizing for Mamun. Since napping for a couple of hours after lunch meant he couldn't fall asleep until 1:00 or 2:00 AM at night. Thus, he found his mornings unbearable!

The compulsion to spend the afternoon socializing was strong; skipping it made him feel suffocated. Commuting via bus and tempo to Mirpur-12 to hang out with friends and returning to the Lodging by 7:00 PM created immense added mental stress.

Teaching the mischievous boys was another psychological strain. After an hour, they would grow restless and start fighting. Only shouting at them would bring silence, but scolding them deeply upset their mother. It was a constant, unbearable dilemma.

Three or four months passed at the Lodging. He hadn't started his IEB studies yet, unable to find a study batch, as most IEB students were working professionals who formed groups only a few months before the exam. Mamun waited and waited.

His only tangible achievement was the completion of his autobiographical novel, Jirno Jibon (The Decayed Life), written over eight months. The manuscript, on Demy-sized paper, totaled two thousand seven hundred pages!

Everything seemed to be falling into place. But whether due to the mystery of creation or a cruel twist of fate, the struggles of some people, despite every effort, simply never end.

Mamun contracted jaundice. His condition worsened overnight so severely that by morning, he could not get out of bed. The host uncle and aunt showed reluctance to provide extra care. Mamun, understanding their position, also did not want to trouble them for a doctor.

He lay down, having eaten a small, unenthusiastic lunch. Evening arrived while he was semi-conscious. Fearing his condition might worsen, Mamun forced himself to leave the house. He bought an apple from a fruit stall beneath the BSCIC[48] Electronics Complex at the Eleven Number Bus Stand and ate it slowly, relishing the taste. Then he boarded a bus to the Twelve Number Bus Stand to see his nephew, Faruk.

The jolting of the bus was unbearable—he felt as though his liver would tear apart within him. It was a new, terrifying sensation. He got off at Twelve and, fearing the roughness of a rickshaw, slowly made his way on foot. Struggling with every step, he reached Faruk's mess in C-Block, only to find he was out tutoring. He gave the mess maid a hurried note: "Faruk, I am very sick! Jaundice. Please inform Big Brother."

The apple had not settled. He vomited upon reaching the lodging house. His fever was sky-high; his body, extremely weak. He passed urine—it was like thick, golden glue. Mamun was paralyzed with fear. Unsure what to eat, the elder student quickly ran out and returned with a glass of sugarcane juice. Drinking it, Mamun survived the night in a state of semi-sleep, semi-wakefulness.

Around nine o'clock that morning, a deep, resonant voice called Mamun's name. Mamun tried to sit up but couldn't. Breathing itself was an effort. He looked up: his elder brother stood there, a vibrant, strong, bright-white-clad figure of authority.

The brother asked the lodging aunt, his voice laced with shock and rage: "Did you take Mamun to a doctor?"

The aunt replied stiffly: "Jaundice has no treatment! So, we didn't take him."

It was a flimsy excuse. The brother simply stated: "If something tragic had happened, who would have borne the responsibility?" The aunt's face darkened with fear. The brother, furious, told her: "I am taking Mamun away for treatment."

The loud, heavily smoking petrol-and-oil-fueled baby taxi transported him to his second brother's house in Science Laboratory. He spent the entire day receiving saline at the chamber of a famous doctor in Dhanmondi. A day later, thanks to the small, steady care of his second sister-in-law, his condition marginally improved. From Science Lab, the eldest brother took Mamun to Savar, where he was to rest for a month.

He returned to the lodging house from Savar, having fully recovered. But an odd side effect remained: tea and cigarettes tasted bitter!

Mamun understood from the aunt and uncle's demeanor that they no longer wished to keep him. After two or three days, he discussed it with them openly. They clarified: "We were looking for a lodging tutor who could dedicate himself to the children day and night, tirelessly. It is not possible for you to fulfill that responsibility."

Mamun packed his bag and returned to Savar. He spent a month there immersed in novels, the most significant of which was Buddhadeva Guha's Madhukari[49]. But his sister-in-law, anticipating a prolonged stay, grew increasingly annoyed by Mamun's continuous presence. To prevent the relationship from deteriorating, he left again for Mirpur-12.

He stopped at the house of his former students, Babu and Mumu, hoping he might secure a tuition job for one of the three siblings. The aunt offered him snacks. Just then, Mumu returned from college. She had grown up considerably, looking tall in her navy blue uniform and white pajamas. Her face was bright red and sweaty from the sun. Seeing Mamun seated there after such a long time, she was flustered and offered a hesitant greeting.

As Mamun ate, the aunt listened attentively to his entire story. She explained that Babu and Mumu now studied with school and college teachers, and young Bappi also had a private tutor. Nevertheless, Mamun had irrationally, almost miraculously, hoped that the aunt would tell him he could stay for a few days if he was in trouble. But the reality was devoid of emotion. The aunt, looking sad, bid Mamun farewell.

Amidst the overheated houses, the noisy streets, and the loud rush of vehicles, Mamun climbed onto a mini-bus. As the bus traveled from Mirpur-2 toward Mirpur-12, Mamun reflected: If Mumu's parents had convinced his elder brother to accept that lodging offer years ago, Mamun would not be wandering helplessly on the streets today. He could have studied well and been admitted to a university—or secured a job in the Army... he could have gotten one. Or failing that, he could have at least started his B.Sc. at the IEB! He lapsed into exhaustion, lifeless with reflection. The speed of the car and the speed of Mamun's life were entirely antithetical. His existence was becoming unbearable, tossed back and forth by unknown, cruel impulses.

He met Tutul in D-Block and moved back into the same tin-shed room—a single mattress on the floor! The tin roof had no false ceiling to reduce the heat. He had about seventy Taka left from the one hundred his elder brother had given him before leaving Savar.

8

His friend Chhoton asked him to tutor his two sisters, Munmun and Tulu, for a salary of four hundred Taka. Mamun was known among his friends as a good, honest boy. But if he had been attending university, he would have had far more lucrative tuition offers.

Tutul's room rent was several months overdue. The landlady relentlessly pressured them morning and evening.

Breakfast was a luxury Mamun could never afford. Around ten friends, all better students than Mamun, had, through misfortune or negligence, also failed to gain university admission. They all gathered at Raju's Hotel[50] around 10:00 AM. The Adda (socializing)[51] continued until two or three in the afternoon. Among them, Hasan—who was currently attempting to launch a career as a hero in Bengali cinema—stayed with Mamun until late afternoon. He truly was the hero of their time with his figure and face!

Some of the friends would arrive at Raju's and immediately order shingara[52] and puri[53]. Mamun would wait, his hungry stomach empty, hoping for a share. He hated going home for lunch. The soul-shaking heat of June-July, the lack of food at home. Sometimes he could eat lunch, but not dinner.

To escape the mosquitoes at night, his roommate Tutul would place four mosquito coils around the mattress! They kept the door open for air circulation. But the smoke was so intense it went straight up Mamun's nose. Yet, if they moved the coils farther away, the mosquitoes bit. Tutul had a high tolerance; he slept soundly.

Every morning, as soon as the sun rose, Mamun would wake up, irritated. The room was filled with heat and smoke, but Tutul would wake Mamun with a cautious whisper every morning—ensuring his sleep wasn't broken by the sheer agony of the heat.

While daytime hunger could be endured through distraction, dinner was crucial; one cannot sleep on an empty stomach.

Every night, Mamun waited on the wooden platform behind Zainal Bhai's[54] Tong-shop (street stall) under the D-Block banyan tree until deep into the night, waiting for his friend Arshad. This intimate friend was one of the few who fully and deeply knew the extent of Mamun's suffering. Arshad would give him some money nightly. Mamun would buy 250 ML of Milk Vita[55] liquid milk for seven Taka and a large round loaf of bread for four Taka. This was how he survived the night!

Sometimes, Arshad would give him a hundred or one hundred and fifty Taka for groceries. At other times, Mamun swallowed his pride and borrowed fifty to one hundred Taka from close friends like Lenin, Pulok, and Opu.

Late one night, around midnight, Gaus, one of the few friends who stayed until the very end of Adda, witnessed Mamun's purchase of milk and bread. Gaus lamented, offering advice: "If you continue like

this, you will surely die, man!" Mamun answered in a sad, faint voice: "Friend, I just need to get a few more tuition jobs, and the money problems will be fixed, Inshallah."

Day after day, week after week, month after month, the cycle of semi-starvation, hunger, malnutrition, indiscipline, and unbearable mental anguish crushed Mamun. He became skeletal. His handsome, oblong face thinned; his cheeks sunken. His features grew gaunt and sharp!

Internally, only remorse and self-blame persisted in an endless loop, an obsession: "Why did I ignore my elder brother's advice? If I had taken the lodging at Mumu's house, I wouldn't be enduring this unspeakable hardship for food and shelter. I could have prepared well and secured university admission. Even if that failed, if I hadn't given away my pen to that other student during the Jahangirnagar University viva in a moment of playful generosity, the professors wouldn't have been annoyed—I might have passed the final exam. If I had, at least, borrowed money from friends to buy a couple of guidebooks and prepared better for the Second Lieutenant exam, I would be an earning officer today. I would be living well. If I had simply fought for my share of the money when the Gaibandha house was sold, I could have started my IEB engineering course…"

This relentless combination of extreme student life depression, fear of an uncertain future, constant dredging of past failures, pervasive negative thinking, utter lack of self-confidence, a crushing life of endless monotony, final loss of motivation, and infinite physical and mental weakness created a cyclical thought atmosphere in Mamun's mind—which finally coalesced into Obsessive Preoccupation[56].

Due to sleep disturbance and chronic sleep deficit, he fractured even further, physically and mentally. Indoors or outdoors, sitting or standing, walking or talking, even while listening to others or speaking himself, the same thought endlessly circled in his head: "Alas, what will become of me?" From this intolerable mental agony, suicidal tendencies emerged in him gradually!

One morning, as he aimlessly put on his shirt and pants, the thought flashed through his mind with helpless clarity: "If I commit suicide, all problems will be solved. I will no longer have to live in fear and apprehension over the two-thirds of my uncertain life that remains."

This intense obsessive preoccupation drove Mamun out of the house. His vision blurred as the fierce sun and heat struck his body. The world around him felt like the darkened, eerie daylight during a total solar eclipse.

Like a bewildered traveler, he stumbled on weak, trembling legs to the nearby Muslim Market. He found a confectionery shop and asked in a strained, faint voice: "Do you have any rope?"

The shopkeeper stared in astonishment, confirming: "Rope? You'll find rope at the hardware store!"

Mamun stammered, reality rushing back. To hide his shame, he quickly blurted out: "Oh, right! Do you have any cake?" Though he didn't know what he wanted, what he should eat, or what would taste good, he reluctantly took the five-Taka cake, sat down at the adjacent street stall, and ate it with an air of indifference. He drank tea. He lit a cigarette.

The tea and cigarette created a combined stimulus in his brain! This stimulus sparked enthusiasm. Enthusiasm sparked aspiration. Aspiration sparked hope. The simple desire to continue living... Mamun

reconsidered the situation based on the words of a famous novelist: "When life becomes unbearable, we should reflect on what we still enjoy doing."

Mamun considered his own case: “I still enjoy drinking tea and smoking cigarettes, I enjoy socializing with friends, I enjoy laughing heartily, I enjoy listening to music, and I enjoy watching historical and science-fiction films!

He realized he still had a chance to become a Second Lieutenant! Only once, he had been disqualified from the initial screening simply because he had long hair. He had a window of four years, from seventeen to twenty-one, in which one could take the exam at least eight times. Mamun had taken it eight times so far, but only managed to reach the ISSB once. However, he had one more opportunity to appear for the ISSB. According to his academic documents, he still had about six months before he turned twenty-one. If he could somehow succeed in the last Long Course exam, all his suffering would vanish. These positive thoughts flooded his mind with hope.

Instead of buying the rope, Mamun bought a round eggplant. For lunch, he ate eggplant fry with dal[57] and rice. He slept until evening.

After sundown, he went to sit under the banyan tree. The bright moonlight of the month of Jyestha[58], scattered through the gaps in the leaves, fell onto Mamun's hands, feet, face, and eyes. The areas around them, untouched by the moonlight, looked dark and black. His friends began to arrive, one by one.

Due to the lack of a fan at home, Mamun’s entire body was covered in prickly heat. His face carried a deep, black shadow of profound sadness. Many things are immediately noticed by truly sincere and conscientious friends—a capacity reserved only for parents and siblings, whom God defines as: "Four of the fourteen most sacred relationships."

Gaus arrived, followed by Lenin. Lenin asked: "Why do you look so crestfallen?"

Mamun replied in a weak voice: "I'm going through a really bad time. I feel like committing suicide!"

Lenin and Gaus were jolted and shocked. They asked: "What kind of problem would drive a tough guy like you to suicide?"

They knew Mamun's character. They knew, more or less, about Mamun's continuous suffering. But when they pressed him for specific details, Mamun only mentioned two immediate needs: buying a fan and buying books for the BA[59] exam.

Following Gaus’s advice, Mamun had registered as a private candidate for the Degree exam at Government Bangla College for only one hundred and fifty Taka. This money was provided by his generous friend, Masud. Lenin, with a mix of consolation and regret, said: "Mamun, friend! You can’t stop a flood with a sand dam. But you can try to stop it! Buying books is more urgent than buying a fan. The summer heat will lessen within a month. So, I will give you five hundred Taka for books instead of a fan."

The next morning, Lenin secured five hundred Taka from his mother and took Mamun to Nilkhet to buy old books. After a lengthy search, matching the syllabus exactly, they bought books for all the subjects and returned by noon.

Mamun's profile as a B.A. candidate boosted his number of tuition jobs. The following month, he used his tuition earnings to buy a new ceiling fan. His roommate, Tutul, was ecstatic and exclaimed: "Arey, yaar! Fan ke liye tumhara inaam milega[60] (Hey, buddy! You'll get a reward for the fan)!"

Though not a dedicated student himself, Tutul had deep respect for education and began to encourage Mamun. A new surge of enthusiasm and spirit returned to Mamun.

However, after nearly five years disconnected from institutional education, he struggled immensely to memorize the lessons. Six months later, at the end of winter, the exams began. His exams in Bengali, English, and Social Welfare went well. But in the third paper, History of Islam: Europe, Mamun was severely shaken. Trying to take a shortcut by only studying the suggested topics, not a single question was common!

He was panic-stricken. Sweat broke out on his body. The exam hall seemed to spin. His vision blurred. Would he fail the B.A. exam too? Mamun tried desperately to regain his composure.

The world belongs to the brave!

He read the questions carefully again. Although Mamun had spent the last five years like a vagabond—tutoring and socializing—the one productive thing he had done was read everything he could lay his hands on: stories, novels, literature, history, essays, anthologies, and psychology—devouring it all like an omnivorous creature.

Using that immense knowledge as his resource, he began to answer the questions on the history of Europe, describing the era with his own analysis and intellect, as if writing directly from primary history, not from a guidebook.

In the exam paper, Mamun wrote ninety-four marks' worth of answers without referencing specific years, cleverly weaving together the contexts of Napoleon’s expansion, Lenin’s role in World War-I, and Hitler’s rise leading to World War-II.

9

Chanchal, a friend who had been a top student in school but also failed to gain university admission, was studying Honors in Accounting under the National University. The great quality of intelligent students is that they are always aware of opportunities.

He advised Mamun to enroll in a one-year professional diploma course in Travel Agency and Tour Operation at NHTTI[61].Completing this course guaranteed a job. And since Mamun was good at English, he would easily succeed.

This was a job related to domestic and international travel. It meant meeting new places and new people, both men and women. Mamun was instantly excited by the thought!

He took the admission test at the Hotel Avakash[62] in Mohakhali. There were about three hundred bright, dazzling young men and women. Most aspired to become stewards and air hostesses—whose primary assets were beauty and wit. Mamun merely wanted to be a Travel Agency Tour Operator. He was confident.

When the results were published, Mamun ranked seventeenth among the forty successful candidates!

Mamun completed the nine-month course with tremendous enthusiasm. Most of his classmates secured jobs as sales executives in airlines and travel agencies, because their relatives worked in those offices. Mamun had no such connections.

Nevertheless, he and his classmates, Albert and Fuad, met with officials at several travel agencies in Gulshan and Banani[63] through various contacts. They talked, they left their CVs. A few promised they would call when a position opened up.

Months passed. But not a single call came from anywhere!

Kowtowing to anyone was against Mamun’s nature. But his classmates advised him that if he explained everything to Rabeya Madam, the Head of the NHTTI department, she would certainly arrange a job for him.

Mamun met the Madam with great hesitation and ambivalence. He recounted the essence of his life struggle! The Madam was moved and consoled him: "Life succeeds through struggle." And she assured him that she would arrange a job shortly.

About two weeks later, news of a job interview came through the landline phone at his friend Rubel's house. The job was for a Sales Executive position at Pathfinder, a new travel agency under the Texas Group, located on the fifth floor of the ABC Tower, left of the Banani Post Office. He interviewed and secured the job!

There is always a vast gap between imagination and reality. The salary was merely three thousand Taka. His friend Bappi, the son of a wealthy family, commented: "Only three thousand! That money will only cover your tie and dry cleaning, man."

This proved true. It was extremely difficult to manage rent, food, commuting, and pocket money on three thousand Taka. He was forced to take an advance salary from the accounting department every month-end to make it through.

A Sales Executive's core duty at the travel agency was to confirm hotel and air ticket bookings, reservations, and purchases for foreign travelers. This meant carrying bags filled with over a lakh (hundred thousand) Taka to airline offices to buy tickets and occasionally delivering them to clients.

Regardless of whether the client was a saint or a thief/scammer, Mamun was required to address them as "Sir." Doing this severely bruised Mamun's sense of pride!

Mamun had a few specific clients, such as the famous Bengali cinema villain Ahmed Sharif, the young director of the country's leading construction company, Abdul Monem Limited, and the young director of the Texas Group, among others.

Commuting from home to the office began to feel like torture to Mamun. From D-Block to Mirpur 11.5 bus stand, he had to take a tempo—and even then, he often had to fight for a seat. A rickshaw was too expensive. From 11.5 to Farmgate, he couldn't get a seat on the bus and had to stand, clutching the rod, enduring the shakes, pushes, and shoves. Then, from Farmgate, he had to take another tempo to Banani, because getting a seat on a bus there was nearly impossible. The other way to reach office is: from the Mirpur 11.5 to Mirpur Ten Circle by bus, getting a tempo to Kachukhet, and then a rickshaw to the Mohakhali Rail Crossing; drastically reduced the travel time and hardship—but the rickshaw fare was too high!

One morning. September's muggy heat. Mamun was heading to the office, standing on the footboard of the tempo alongside the helper, with his handbag slung across his body. He was submerged in the obsessive preoccupation of his past suffering and the infinite struggle of his future.

The young helper boy shouted: "Boss! Right side, Thola[64]!"

Mamun snapped to attention and saw a reserved tempo carrying a police unit. Twelve policemen were seated facing each other in two rows, their rifles propped vertically between their legs. They wore sky-blue uniforms, and above the tempo was the clear, blue, cloudless sky of autumn. The surroundings were filled with bright, dazzling yellow sunlight. The rush of disorganized wind and the parallel, fast pace of the two tempos seemed to Mamun like a metaphor: the police represented a swift, resolute future, running in competition with his own shaky, private-sector future.

Mamun thought: These police officers, at least, have an identity. Even if the general public doesn't respect them from the heart, they at least fear them. But what does he have? His position and the position of the tempo's helper, standing together on the same precarious footboard, continuing the motion!

One morning, after this kind of jolting journey, he reached the office. On the newspaper placed on his desk, he saw the recruitment advertisement for the Police Sub-Inspector position. A decision struck his mind with lightning speed: “I must become a Police Officer!”

No sooner said than done. He applied. The invitation for the preliminary screening also arrived. He reported to the Rajshahi[65] Police Headquarters. He passed the running, jumping, and physical measurement tests.

It was 1997. The anti-government movement was at its peak, marked by relentless blockades and hartals (strikes). Long-distance buses were suspended. He managed somehow to reach Ishwardi[66] by train to appear for the written exam.

It was the dead of a winter night. Not even a dog was on the road. The dim, weak lights of the provincial town barely pierced the deep gloom. The asphalt road was wet with fog. Occasionally, a single truck would flash past, its headlights momentarily illuminating the scene. Mamun was worried: How would he reach Rajshahi? He had to report to the Police Line School by 8:00 AM.

Half an hour later, a police pickup van pulled up beside Mamun. He stood hesitantly and approached the police officer. He took out his exam admit card from his bag, offered a salute, and explained his predicament. The officer read the card in the light of his torch, smiled faintly, and with encouragement, hailed a truck. He instructed the driver: "Listen, this is Mamun, one of our men. He's going to Rajshahi for an exam—he'll soon be a police officer. Deliver him safely!"

Since there was no empty seat next to the driver, Mamun had to climb onto the back of the cargo-loaded truck. Seeing Mamun get on, two or three other desperate passengers also pleaded with the police officer and climbed aboard. The tarpaulin covering the goods was drenched in thick fog. Mamun's pants were soaked. The situation was dire.

The truck accelerated, speeding down the black highway shrouded in smoky fog. Fortunately, the full moon was directly overhead. The open moonlight made the surroundings feel celestial. The icy wind rushed loudly through his nose and into his lungs. Occasionally, the gusts of wind almost stopped his breath. His hands, feet, and body were stiff and trembling with cold. Mamun cleverly huddled up against the engine side of the truck bed. He tightly clutched the rope securing the tarpaulin with a strong grip to prevent being thrown off by the jolting. Moments later, thin, clear water began pouring uncontrollably from his nose! Mamun was terrified—it was a new, frightening experience.

Thinking that great struggle and perseverance are necessary to achieve success in life, he finally reached the Rajshahi BIT[67] gate. He spent the night comfortably in his friend Rubel's room.

The next morning, the Bengali, English, and Mathematics exams went well. But the General Knowledge (Bangladesh section) questions felt "extraordinary." The questions were: Describe the coal resources of Bangladesh. Describe the stone (rock) resources of Bangladesh—it felt exactly like a geography exam! Only a couple of questions were relevant: Write the history of the police force. Why do you want to become a police officer?

He had no specific preparation for the written exam. No guidebooks or syllabi for the Sub-Inspector post were available in the market. Relying on his past preparation for the Second Lieutenant exam and his almost-forgotten expertise in Tenth Grade Geography, he wrote answers based on sheer imagination.

He was anxious about passing. Scoring very well in this exam was absurd, and thus students rarely passed the exam. Most were unsuccessful. Mamun faced the same outcome. He was deeply disappointed.

The office had created problems because he had taken six days off—three days for each of the two times he had to travel to Rajshahi for the exams. His desire to become a police officer had resulted in such obsessive preoccupation that it led to a compulsive attitude. He became so self-confident that he must pass the exam. It was the reaction born of this attitude, thought-pattern, pride, and self-respect that led him to quit his job.

10

Mamun’s elder brother had been suffering from schizophrenia for eight long years. He was living a peaceful, gentle, but mad existence. On the psychiatrist’s advice, his sister-in-law (the brother’s wife) requested Mamun's help in moving them from Science Lab to Mirpur with a view to change their current small house and crowdy living place.

Mamun, Tutul, and another roommate, Nizam Mama (Uncle), moved out of the tin-shed room into a two-room flat with one dining place. They were joined by Mamun's brother, sister-in-law, and two twin daughters.

Nizam Mama felt uncomfortable living in the small two-room flat with an unfamiliar family. He quietly decided to find another mess and leave. He, Tutul, and Mamun had been together in the tin-shed room before, so they couldn't just refuse him immediately. However, Tutul had no issues; he adjusted well with the family.

Nizam Mama was a talented student, achieving first-class results up to his Degree level. His handwriting was incredibly beautiful—like that of a typewriter! But unable to secure a government job, he continued working as a private tutor. He left the flat the following month. Tutul was a foreman at Libra Pharmaceuticals, earning a negligible salary.

After quitting the travel agency job, it became difficult for Mamun to suddenly find new tuition work. After about six months of being unable to pay the flat rent, friction arose with his sister-in-law. Mamun's sister-in-law took his brother and the two twin nieces and moved back to Science Lab.

It was the winter of 1998. Under pressure from the landlord over arrears, Mamun and Tutul began returning to the flat late at night. Tutul would eat at his grandmother's house and sleep in one room. In the other room, Mamun.

Mamun endured the frigid nights half-fed and starving! Sometimes, they managed to scrape by for a couple of meals by pooling five or ten Taka just to buy some vegetables. He never owned winter clothing. He had borrowed a flannel full-sleeve shirt from his friend Arshad.

With old leather sandals on his feet, pressed full-pants, and the borrowed flannel shirt, stomach empty, and future uncertain—that is how he passed the entire winter!

At the beginning of the new year, he found some tuition jobs again. As summer began, he started studying the Business English books for the MBA course, borrowed from his neighborhood friend and junior, Nuru. He had to secure a job no matter what.

One day, Nuru came to the adda (gathering) at Raju's Hotel and announced an opportunity to the assembled friends: The World Bank and the Government of Bangladesh had jointly initiated a new project, IDCOL[68]. It had advertised openings for several positions. The only position for B.A. passed candidates was "Office Support Staff," with a salary of seven thousand five hundred Taka! The single

condition was proficiency in English. Nuru, who was impressed by Mamun's English skills, strongly encouraged him to apply by mail.

Weeks later, the interview letter arrived! Joyfully, Mamun reported to the fifth floor of the newly constructed twenty-story IDB[69] Bhaban (building) near Agargaon Circle.

There were about twenty-five other candidates. Mamun, third in line, entered the huge, elegant room. Two massive figures were seated there. Both were fair-skinned, with broad faces, radiating powerful intelligence and authority. Both were middle-aged—one American, one Bengali.

Both started speaking in deep, resonant English: "Essentially, you will be handling administrative work in this office. However, you will also have to perform some small tasks, such as washing all the utensils after office hours and tidying up! This is because there is no peon or office boy here. You will need to regularly purchase daily food and beverages from the local market. In case of urgent necessity, you will have to make and serve tea and coffee to VIP or CIP[70] guests—although, in this office, following the Western practice, everyone usually goes to the pantry to make their own tea and coffee."

The Bengali official, seated at the main desk, asked: "Do you have any objections?"

Mamun hesitated slightly about performing the menial tasks (odd jobs)! But believing that to grow big, one must first become small, he answered firmly and clearly: "I have no objection... Sir!

The office started on the First of June. Mamun had a colleague in the same position: Mr. Abdul Motin. Motin was lanky, dark-skinned, curly-haired, with sunken cheeks and a mustache. Motin Bhai introduced him to the office's eleven officials.

First, he was taken to the Bangladeshi Managing Director: Dr. M. Fauzul Kabir Khan, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Finance. Dr. Khan held double Honors and Master's degrees in Finance and Banking from Dhaka University and Boston University, New York, and a Ph.D. from Boston as well! He was the head of the interview board.

Next was Robert J. Parra, the Finance Specialist. Also on the interview board, he was a US citizen and one of the top ten economists listed by the World Bank. He was a cheerful, sociable, and simple man in his sixties. He stood up from his chair, extended his hand, and greeted Mamun with an American accent: "Hi, Mamun! How do you doing?"

Next, they went to the third official, Masudur Rahman Mondol, the Company Secretary. He was a huge, obese, moustachioed, dark-skinned gentleman. Mamun later learned from Motin Bhai that the Company Secretary had been a powerful, aggressive student leader in the Mirpur-Shyamoli area, whose wife was an English newsreader for BTV[71].

There were two other young officers. One was Fida Al-Hasan, the MD's Associate Officer. He was broad-faced, immaculately white, tall, neat, quiet, gentle, and spoke little. He held a Finance Master's degree from Dhaka University.

The other was Rahaat Zaman Sohel Chowdhury Khan Chanchal! He held a Finance Master's degree from North South University. Chanchal was lively, cheerful, sociable, talkative, witty, brown-skinned, lanky, and of medium height. He often joked, telling everyone: "I am the only son in the family! So, to protect

the family name, all my dear elders chose their own favorite names—a total of eleven!" He was Robert J. Parra's Associate Officer.

In addition, there were three other officials: Miss Gulfam—a beautiful, ideally proportioned, and soft-spoken Documentation Officer; and two accounting officers, Iktedar Hossain and Moniruzzaman.

The office hours were rotational. In one week, from 7:00 AM in the morning to 3:00 PM. The other week, it ran from 3:00 PM to 11:00 PM. Mamun and Motin rotated between the two shifts.

The morning shift passed quickly with busy work. But the afternoon shift began to feel difficult, painful, pathetic, and desolate. The main office staff left by 5:00 PM. Mamun's work was reduced to washing the cups, saucers, and a couple of dishes in the pantry. After that, the vast office became silent and empty. He could pace from one end to the other of the L-shaped office, carpeted in ash-grey, but still the time would not pass. The five hours from 6:00 PM to 11:00 PM felt like five days! The only reason for staying until eleven was to wait for the drivers, Hossain and Jamal [male], to return and deposit the car keys.

The massive rectangular conference room was at the back of the office. If one pulled up the vertical blinds of its two-hundred-foot-long glass windows, a large pond was visible, and beyond that, the Agargaon Passport Office. The road in front of the Passport Office and the Agargaon-Shyamoli connecting road, bathed in the yellow glow of neon lights, looked dreamy, lonely, silent, indifferent, and helpless!

Occasionally, Mamun would pull a chair up to the window and leisurely sip coffee. Then, he would open the window and secretly light a cigarette!

This was essentially stolen pleasure. The entire IDB Bhaban was equipped with CFDS[72]. If an unusual amount of smoke or heat was generated, the fire alarm would sound! One day, after smoking, he forgot to close the window. When his colleague Motin came in for his afternoon shift the next day, he whispered: "Mamun Bhai, why did you leave the window open yesterday? The entire conference room was filled with thousands of insects and bugs!" Mamun, panicked, lied: "The central AC[73] was off; so I opened the windows." [Although it was autumn—the peak breeding season for insects!]

IDCOL's journey began with an initial capital of $210 million. The World Bank had loaned the money to Bangladesh Bank for development projects—specifically, to provide loans to private institutions for projects concerning roads, electricity, and communication. IDCOL was a Public Limited Company, meaning high-ranking government and private-sector officials served as its directors.

The government representatives included Dr. Toufique-e-Elahi Chowdhury[74], Bir Bikrom[75], Energy Secretary; Dr. Shafiur Rahman of the Ministry of Finance; and others. The private sector directors included prominent industrialists like Abdul Awal Mintu, Chairman of Incontrade Ltd.; Yusuf Abdullah Harun, Chairman of Southeast Bank; and heads of top construction firms like Abdul Monem Ltd. and private power project builders like Summit Group.

When the massive, corpulent MD of IDCOL spoke, his deep, resonant voice made the entire office tremble. One day, red-faced, he roared: "Do we have to obey the PM[76] just because she says so? We are the ones who run her!" Yet, this same MD would become timid and meek when his seniors arrived.

One day, Energy Secretary Dr. Toufique-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Bir Bikrom, entered the office with a cigar in his hand. Seeing the neat, air-conditioned premises, he handed the remaining cigarette butt to Deputy Secretary Dr. Fauzul Kabir Khan and scolded him with an irritated, humorous tone: "Hah! Fauzul has bagged a massive foreign office. You can't even smoke a Biri [cigar] here!"

In the presence of these corporate and state power brokers—their mannerisms, conversations, and activities—Mamun felt himself to be insignificant, utterly insignificant!

Passing the lonely, silent, and monotonous hours until 11:00 PM became difficult. Then there was the addiction to cigarettes. But going outside to smoke was time-consuming. There were no shops near the IDB Bhaban. He had to walk past Agargaon to the Passport Office market to buy cigarettes. It was all a huge hassle.

Winter had started. One day, MD Sir Dr. Fauzul Kabir and Robert J. Parra had dismissed their personal cars early for private engagements. Around 8:00 PM, the MD Sir commanded Mamun in an authoritative voice to get the pool-car out and quickly took the lift downstairs. Mamun, terrified, began sweating despite the cold winter!

Where would he find the pool-car? Mamun had previously told the two drivers to go home, thinking they would be late to return. Yet, Mamun's duty was to collect all the car keys and leave the office, no matter how late.

Five or seven minutes later, the office landline rang. A violent tremor ran through Mamun's entire body! He knew for certain that the phone had rung from the MD Sir downstairs. The moment Mamun picked up, the MD bellowed: "Mamun, where is the car?" Mamun fearfully replied: "No car has returned yet, Sir." The MD commanded him to come downstairs.

Mamun felt his knees weaken. He rushed down. The MD was standing near the security reception desk, looking utterly displeased. Parra's expression was normal. The MD asked with a grim face: "How much farther away is the car?" Mamun had no answer. He asked again: "Where is the car, actually?" Mamun revealed the truth in a voice filled with helplessness.

The MD's face reddened, and he spoke in a harsh tone: "Mamun. Remember this—you are a peon! Your job is only to follow orders. You do not have the authority to make any decision, like an officer."

The fear of losing his job, regret for his mistake, remorse for getting caught in a lie, the deep inferiority complex[78] over the menial position, and the worry that someone he knew might have overheard the word 'Peon'—all this utterly debilitated Mamun. The IDB Bhaban security officer, a handsome, shrewd young man who respectfully addressed Mamun as 'Brother,' was standing nearby with a walkie-talkie! Had he heard the MD's words? Mamun's throat dried up, he saw spots of darkness, and extreme despair overwhelmed him.

J. Parra softened his tone to ease the situation: "Fauzul! Is there any other option to go home today?" The MD replied: "That's right! What can we do else? All the shits here."

One morning, the MD sat in his chamber with his daughter—a beautiful girl with an ideal physique, just like her father. The MD summoned Mamun in the tone of a feudal landlord. Mamun instinctively

understood—he would surely be asked to serve tea or coffee. The father would assert his authority in front of his only daughter, who was studying in Singapore, under the guise of hospitality. Mamun went before them, filled with hesitation and shame.

The MD commanded: "Mamun! Serve my daughter coffee beautifully."

Serving coffee fetched from the pantry was not strictly Mamun’s duty. But now, by executive order, it had to be done! Mamun was deeply wounded!

One day at noon, Mamun went to the office and saw that Motin Bhai and Mamun's single chair meant for sitting was gone. When Mamun inquired, Motin Bhai replied in a dry tone: "The MD Sir has removed the chair to punish us." Hearing this, Mamun’s face flushed; his earlobes grew hot and started tingling. Taking away the chair was the ultimate act of humiliation!

They could retrieve the removed chair and sit down only during the evening shift at 5:00 PM when all other office staff had departed. However, during the morning shift, working eight continuous hours—from seven until three—standing up was beyond his strength. His legs would ache; his body would be subdued. The mental defeat before the eight remaining officers in the office—especially the act of yielding to the gaze of his young colleague, Gulfam—was something he simply could not accept. Gulfam had been a student at Shaheed Anwar Girls' College, which was right next to Mamun's Adamjee Cantonment College. Because of this shared locality, she viewed Mamun differently. She at least thought that, come what may, Mamun's career was not destined for a peon's role; he must be temporarily taking this odd-job due to financial duress. But the removal of the chair made one thing brutally clear: Mamun had been nothing, but a peon in this office all along!

In this office, everyone except Mamun and Motin Bhai had a promising career ahead of them. Each of them was expected to receive at least one or two promotions during their five-year contract-based tenure. But for Motin and Mamun, there was zero scope for advancement. Office Support Staff was a marginalized, peripheral position. If the IDCOL project was not renewed after five years, all other officers would be able to secure jobs in other projects using their professional experience. But Motin and Mamun had no such prospects. The current job dissatisfaction and the uncertainty of their future careers created a suppressed conflict within Mamun’s mind. His colleague Motin was in the same predicament—he did not know what they should do.

With a third-class B.A. certificate, one could not expect any real success in their working life. Mamun enrolled as a private candidate in the M.A. Preliminary course in the English Department at Dhaka College[79]. He bought a “Professor’s Guide” from Nilkhet and began studying. Literature is a difficult subject—English Literature even more so. The examination was set to begin in just three months. He did not have time to read the original texts. But understanding the Q&A from just the guide, without having read the original poems, essays, stories, plays, or novels, was proving to be a difficult task. The job… The internal conflict, restlessness, and anxiety in his life meant his studies were not progressing well either.

The less self-respect a person possesses, the happier they are. Mamun’s sense of self-respect was far higher than normal. Professional life is what confers the greatest honor upon a man, yet Mamun’s work was actively dishonoring him.

He attempted to console himself. The philosophy that one must humble oneself to grow did not create any sense of motivation within him. The monthly salary of Taka 7,500 had brought a degree of solvency to his life. During his tutoring days, the wallet gifted by his friend Tarun often held less than five Taka; now it always contained at least Taka 500. Previously, the torment of hunger was a constant companion; now, despite having thousands of Taka in his pocket, lack of appetite, disinterest, aversion, dissatisfaction, restlessness, and uncertainty had become his inseparable partners.

At the end of a busy, exhausting day, all of a person’s peace and happiness are contained within a good night’s sleep. Mamun, however, did not even feel the desire to go to sleep. His body was fatigued, but his mind remained relentlessly active. He had to go to the office the next day. This office was a place of neglect, humiliation, and degradation for him. Still, he had to continue. What would he do if he quit his job? Reverting to the tutoring life! Back to teaching in people’s homes like a weary, hungry dog? When a person cannot do what they should do or are capable of doing, due to helplessness, a profound sadness takes root. This sorrow makes him agitated. It ruins all the good things in his life.

Lately, sleep eluded him when he went to bed. In psychosomatic medicine and health science, if sleep does not arrive within a maximum of 45 minutes of lying down, it is considered an affliction. For Mamun, it was taking one and a half, two, or even three hours. And sometimes, even if he fell asleep quickly, he would wake up after only three or four hours of sleep. After that, he would not fall asleep again until morning!

Not being able to sleep with an exhausted body, or spending more than half the night sleepless after only a short period of rest, creates an indescribable form of suffering and agony. Before a person falls asleep, the body gradually becomes inert. The body's automatic muscles begin to relax. Only then does the peaceful slumber arrive.

When a person is going through a crisis, their brain often becomes even more vigorously active after lying down for a short rest, rather than allowing sleep to come. The mind automatically begins seeking a way out of the crisis… seeking a solution. The body revitalizes, the temperature rises, and the scattered thoughts become systematically organized. Consequently, the automatic muscles—which should be relaxing—become active. This precise physical and mental process is underway in Mamun every single night after he lies down to sleep.

Even in the peak of the December winter, he sleeps with the ceiling fan running—merely to prevent mosquito bites. However, due to the rising internal heat of his body, he keeps his hands, feet, and head outside the quilt. Otherwise, he would begin to sweat. Yet, after some time, the powerful, whirling cold air from the ceiling fan strikes, chilling his limbs and head. For this, he covers himself again, wrapping the quilt from head to toe. The sensitivity of his brain is so heightened that the faint friction of the metal balls inside the ceiling fan's bearings registers in his ears! The occasional slight squeaking of the old ceiling fan becomes excruciatingly loud. The sound of the fan’s air feels like the unruly, biting gale of the North Pole. The ticking intensity of the second hand on the battery-operated, wall-mounted clock rings in his ears like a school dismissal bell. His roommate, Tutul, sleeps soundly and obliviously. Mamun, utterly exasperated, reduces the fan's speed. He removes the clock's battery. Otherwise, the constant auditory pollution from these two devices would drive him to distraction. He feels as if the clock's cogs and wheels have penetrated his skull! They are clattering, spinning, knocking, and producing an awful racket.

All physical and mental excitation eventually finds abatement. When the whirlwind of thoughts finally subsides, sleep arrives. But after three or four hours, the slumber is broken once more. The crisis that nests in the subconscious mind establishes its authority over the conscious mind—for the subconscious remains vigilant 24 hours a day. It forcibly wakes the conscious mind, compelling it to seek a solution to the problem. If a solution cannot be found, the same thought recurs repeatedly, leading to the creation of rumination. Rumination is a persistent defect of the cognitive process. Certain specific thoughts cycle relentlessly 24 hours a day. They even become active in his dreams.

The subjects of Mamun's rumination are: If he had graciously accepted the offer to take up lodgings at Mumu's house, he would not have been forced into this peon's job today. He could have prepared better and secured university admission. But that path was abandoned! If he hadn't handed his own pen to that particular student during the Jahangirnagar University viva-voce, the professorial title of Mamun… would not have been disappointed in him; and Mamun would have successfully passed the final examination. If he had regularly checked the daily newspaper hung on the neighborhood club wall, he could have sat for the BAMA Long Course examination one last time. If he had forcefully taken his share of the money from the sale of the land in Gaibandha and completed his engineering studies at I.E.B. If he hadn't quit his travel agency job for the impossible hope of becoming a Sub-Inspector, he would not be stuck in this job today! At least there, he had been a Sales Officer.

The sleepless night concludes and dawn breaks. The call to Fajr prayer is heard. Alas! Mamun has not prayed for eight years, not even on Fridays!

He used to be such a devout worshipper. On a sleep-deprived body, hunger strikes quickly. He kept some biscuits and water near his head, beneath Tutul's cot. The biscuits were a special kind—they dissolved instantly upon contact with water. He did this so that his drowsiness would not be disturbed; he would pour these biscuits into the glass and, half-reclined, gulp them down like juice. Thirst would assail him, but he drank little water—because his friend Denal once told him: "Hey, buddy. If you constantly drink water, you'll constantly have to pee. When will you get to sleep then?"

A tormented attempt to summon sleep once more under the quilt, lying on the mattress spread across the floor! Before that agonizing attempt could conclude, his sleep is shattered by the jarring, intrusive sound of the harsh 5:00 AM alarm. The sound of the alarm creates a jolt in his body and mind that further exacerbates the desperation, gloom, and silent lament that has been racing through his head all night long.

The ceaseless contemplation of the past, the extreme frustrations of his student life, the negativity permeating all his thoughts, the severe lack of self-confidence, and the fear of an uncertain future—all combined to create a complete absence of motivation in Mamun's psycho-organic existence. His infinitely exhausting and monotonous life rendered him endlessly weak, both physically and mentally. Fighting against his own will to brush his teeth, take a shower, eat breakfast at the unhygienic local Bengali restaurant, and then commute to the office in a rickety, high-volume vehicle on the main road—all these tasks were physically and mentally debilitating for him.

It is half-past six in the morning, veiled in the thick fog of winter. The minibus races swiftly down the empty road beside the old airport grounds of Agargaon.

Unable to find a seat on the bus, he sits on the engine cover near the women's feet. In this defeated and humiliated posture, head bowed, Mamun endures the constant jolting and ponders: Where is the end to this life of ignominy? Will his existence, like the thick fog accumulated in long streaks over the empty runway of the airport, remain stalled until death?

11

A wealthy family's son Tarun[80] —Mamun's school friend, harmless, with an innocent, charming face, but frustrated and subsequently drug-addicted—came to know of Mamun's indescribable mental agony. He took Mamun to an older doctor brother in Pallabi. The doctor, a BCS[81] Health Cadre, dark-complexioned, round-faced, of medium build, wearing a T-shirt and jeans, listened intently to everything Mamun said with a smile. He reassured Mamun, stating with a pleasant expression: "There is nothing wrong with you. It is a progression: helplessness leads to frustration, frustration leads to melancholy, and melancholy leads to an intense aversion to life." Mamun asked: "Do I have Schizophrenia?" The doctor asked him a few mathematical questions and, upon confirmation, said: "Schizophrenia patients cannot speak coherently." Mamun asked helplessly: "What is the way to escape the tendency toward suicide?" The doctor placed a hand on Mamun's shoulder and said: "I will prescribe some psychoactive medication. Taking these will reduce your anxiety, improve your sleep, refresh your body and mind; consequently, the frustration and melancholy will dissipate. There will be some side effects, such as blurred vision, shaky hands while writing, feeling unbalanced when crossing the road, or getting on a vehicle. But these smaller difficulties must be endured to escape the greater suffering."

Mamun already harbored a fear of psychiatric drugs. His middle brother has been suffering from Schizophrenia for the past eight years. The seven or eight types of medication the psychiatrist prescribed for him are so distressing that he refuses to take them. His sister-in-law forces him to swallow them.

Nonetheless, following the advice of the young doctor, Mamun returned home that night and took two pills around ten o'clock. After ingestion, Mamun waited to observe what changes occurred in his body or mind. Just fifteen minutes later, a tingling sensation..., a current of tranquility spread through his spine and into his entire brain! He realized and rejoiced—these were the positive effects of the medicine.

For the first time in six months, he sank into the depths of a peaceful sleep that very night. He woke up completely only around ten in the morning. His body and mind felt refreshed. However, his mouth felt extremely dry, and he had a dull, throbbing ache in his head. A motherly old cook, was now preparing meals. After having breakfast with rice and curry, he took his second morning dose of the medication. When he returned home at night after finishing the office hours, he felt immensely comforted by the thought that he would sleep peacefully tonight too! But after three or four days, Mamun's body tremor drastically intensified. His hands, feet, and entire body would shake so much that walking became difficult, let alone just sitting still. The tremor extended to his head—as if someone were violently shaking him! His auditory perception, vision, and capacity for thought became sluggish. His throat was so dry that he had to drink water frequently. He even faced difficulty signing office bills and vouchers because of the shaking hand. Mamun understood: "This was the outcome of the war between the medication and the illness. But who would emerge victorious?"

Continuing to run the office with this fragile body and mind became impossible. His colleague Motin Bhai easily detected Mamun's physical symptoms. He advised: "Mamun Bhai! You should ask the MD Sir for a few days of leave." But Mamun thought: It is impossible to fight two wars simultaneously—the

illness and the office. Accounts Officer Monir Bhai also asked him one day: “Mamun Bhai! Are you ill, or what?” Mamun avoided the question out of shame. On another day, Accounts Officer Ikteydar Bhai insisted: “Mamun Bhai! What is your difficulty?” This time, Mamun revealed a little that continuing the job was virtually impossible for him. He, too, advised: “It is critical for you to get well first.”

Seizing this opportunity, Mamun submitted his letter of resignation, citing his mental illness. The Company Secretary, after consulting with the MD, told Mamun: “Mamun! Please change the words ‘mental illness’ in your resignation letter to ‘personal issues.’ The World Bank and the Ministry of Finance will not approve the resignation without a physical verification of the illness.” Mamun complied.

After quitting the job, Mamun's mental anguish dramatically subsided. However, the torment of the medicine’s side effects was unbearable. Thus, he only continued the sleeping pill. He discontinued the remaining two antidepressant[82] medications without consulting the doctor, rationalizing that the non-fee-charging doctor might be annoyed if he sought advice again!

Since the job, which was the root cause of Mamun's mental illness, was gone, and on the other hand, the strong positive influence of the medication had taken effect, he quickly returned to a state of normalcy and health.

12

Pulak's father, a healthy and robust government employee, suddenly passed away due to cardiac arrest. Pulak, in a tearful voice, said: "Father said nothing before leaving. He left everyone in the dark and departed!" Pulak's mother, adhering to religious tradition, requested Mamun to stay at their house with Pulak for Forty Nights[83].

Pulak, who joined BSCIC[84] Bank as a Program Manager right after completing his M.Sc. in Computer Science from Dhaka University, was a good opportunity for Mamun to assist him. And for the time being, Mamun would not have to worry about dinner and breakfast. Mamun began his forty-day stay at Pulak's home. One day, Pulak casually asked: "Why did you quit your job? What will you do now?" Mamun replied: "The job was unbearable to me! Now, I will survive by tutoring for the time being. I am waiting for the result of my M.A. Part I exam, which I completed with great difficulty even while mentally unwell." Pulak asked with concern: "What is your future plan?" Mamun tried to explain with a hesitant tone: "If I can complete my M.A. in English, I will surely get one good job or another. That is what I am hoping for, man!"

Successful and intelligent students often possess a certain kind of wisdom or foresight. Pulak had such a personality. After a moment of thought, he said: "You could take the BCS exam! We have also started preparing for BCS. Group study is a great tool for BCS preparation. You won't get this opportunity again."

The advice struck Mamun's brain with the speed of an electric current! A potential, extreme success still awaited him in the future? His chest trembled at the possible attainment of such high hopes. He felt an unprecedented thrill in his body and mind concerning his future plan!

Thus began the group study program. Fifteen to sixteen friends—from government, non-government, and National University backgrounds. Degree[85], Honors, Master's; First, Second, Third Class—there was no distinction or prejudice. Anyone who had a total of six points across their SSC, HSC, and graduation combined formed a coalition and filled out the application forms for the 22nd BCS examination. They needed a place for their collective study. The routine nighttime gathering spot was converted into a study circle. Under the Banyan tree in D-Block, in front of a rickshaw garage, about ten rickshaws were parked beneath the lamp post. The hoods of these rickshaws were pulled down, and the rickshaws became the study seats for everyone. Every day, the studying continued until midnight, interspersed with easy conversation. The patrol police of Pallabi Thana would express surprise at the unprecedented study methodology of this group of young men, even at such a late hour. One day, a police officer parked his vehicle a short distance away and remarked loudly for his colleagues to hear: "These are the Vidya Sagars[86] of the twentieth first century! They are studying beneath the lamp post. They will become BCS cadres. We will have to call them 'Sir,' understand?"

The friends who had recently secured jobs went to the office in the morning. And most others were job seekers. They would congregate again at Raju's Hotel in the morning.

The long, grill-enclosed veranda section of the roadside hotel remained vacant all day, except in the evening. This area became the hub for their discussions and studying until noon. Every few days, they would put up handwritten posters on large art paper on the hotel wall. These posters contained academic material that was extremely difficult to memorize, such as: geographical straits, mountains, and capitals; the necessary or unnecessary capitals, currencies, and parliamentary names of various countries; the places, names, and years of all crucial historical treaties; and the subject matter, names, and years of the immortal works of historical top-tier writers in Bengali literature, and so on. Even the long-haired owner of Raju's Hotel, the refined and elder local Babul Bhai, one day got up from the cash counter and came over... gave a smile and praised them in astonishment upon seeing the educational charts on the wall! And among the students and younger brothers of the neighborhood, Mamun and his friends became an exemplary model to follow.

In the afternoon, everyone went home for lunch. Mamun would sleep for about two hours and start studying again in the evening. Even power load shedding was defeated—they continued their studies by candlelight. Faruk, one of the top five students from their school days, moved into Mamun's flat with his quilt and pillow. He had sold his own house with the intention of moving to Yokohama, Japan, and was now staying at his only brother-in-law's place. This clever and brilliant student had skipped the Jahangirnagar University admission test in 1992 to sit in the hall and watch the Cricket World Cup match on TV! Later, his student life was spent watching Hindi movies on VCR[87] and playing cards. For various reasons, he did not continue his studies after earning his degree. Receiving such a good study companion further inspired Mamun.

One morning, Mamun and his friend Arshad were at Mymensingh railway station to see off his elder nephew, Faruq, on the train to Gaibandha. The anticipated publication dates for the BCS Preliminary examination results were passing one by one. Seeing a crowd at the station's newspaper stall, Mamun went closer. The exam results were out! Mamun calmly took a newspaper and, with self-assurance, began looking for his roll number in sequential order. He found his number among the nearly thirty thousand roll numbers! With self-pride and an ecstatic voice, Mamun exclaimed: "I knew it, I would definitely pass." Arshad and Faruq congratulated him with astonishment—the expression on both their faces was: "Was Mamun about to write an unbelievable history in his fallen student life?"

Meanwhile, Mamun's tuition earnings increased owing to his status as a BCS examinee. He was even tutoring an English medium Grade 8 student, earning two thousand Taka monthly. He still had four or five other high school and college tuitions. Financial hardship was now a thing of the past.

13

The preparation for the BCS written examination was underway with full intensity. In the midst of this, the results of the M.A. Preliminary examinations were published. With an anxious heart, Mamun visited Dhaka College. He knew that no work completed during a state of mental illness turns out well—thus, expecting a good result was irrational. With trembling hands, he turned the blue pages of the immense, bound volumes one by one. Finally, he located his tabulation sheet. He had failed in one of the five subjects—Poetry—a subject Mamun always struggled to comprehend!

Mamun was not deeply hurt, reasoning that since he had passed the most difficult examination in the country's educational life (BCS Prelims), the M.A. Preliminary was no big deal! He resolved to take the exam again.

The BCS written examination concluded during the winter. Mamun now began preparing firmly for the M.A. Preliminary exam once more. He proposed to his BCS study partner, Faruk, to sit for the M.A. exam in English. Due to his proficiency in English and his experience tutoring many students in the subject, his nickname was "English Faruk." But he replied in a despondent tone: "Let me first see what happens with the BCS written test."

Mamun encouraged his Adamjee College friend, Liton, who, having only a degree pass, was helplessly passing his life by tutoring, gossiping, and playing the guitar. Liton agreed. Together, they went to Nilkhet and this time bought the original texts of English Literature. As a private candidate, he had no opportunity to approach professors to understand the impenetrable English literature of the Victorian Age[88]. His only resources were the Bangla Academy English-to-Bangla dictionary and the Oxford University Press English-to-English dictionary.

After a few days, Liton became alarmed seeing Mamun's ceaseless reading day and night. He asked in astonishment: "How do you find the zeal to study so much at this age, man?" Mamun laughed and replied: "Buddy! This is called BCS devotion."

The M.A. The preliminary examination concluded successfully. Inshallah (God willing), he was sure to achieve at least a second class. But joy and sorrow circulate in Mamun's life like a cycle of suffering. Ten members of their BCS study circle had been able to participate in the written examination. Among them, Opu, Lenin, Chanchal, Faruk, and Mazan Bhai had passed. Mamun's name was not in the newspaper! He was utterly astonished, saddened, and stunned. He hadn't performed poorly enough to fail, had he? His friends consoled him: "Don't be disheartened. The BCS examination is like a great war—it's difficult to predict the outcome!" His friend Gaus, though not a BCS examinee himself, advised Mamun soothingly: "Don't be disappointed; prepare for the next BCS."

The results of the M.A. Preliminary examinations were published. Mamun went to Dhaka College with confidence. Seeing his roll number on the list posted on the notice board banished the grief of having failed the BCS written exam. With a voice full of pride, he asked the office assistant to show him the tabulation sheet. Once again, he was delighted to see his name on the blue checkered page of that massive

bound volume. But he received a Third Class! Why? He looked closely and saw he had received low marks in Poetry, the subject he always understood least. Due to this, his total score was just eight marks short of a higher division, resulting in the Third Class. He reassured himself: "No problem, the final exam result is the decisive one—I just have to score a little higher there, that's all!"

Two years of BCS devotion had passed. In the meantime, only Opu and Mazan Bhai from their study circle had made it to the viva-voce stage. Both were post-graduates from Jahangirnagar University—neither was nominated for any cadre position. However, Opu's university classmate, the son of a poor farmer from Nilphamari[89], secured the Education Cadre! He came to Raju's Hotel one day and, with a satisfied expression, motivated Mamun and the others in the manner of an elder brother: "Friends! Prepare even better for the next BCS. This examination is only for the devoted. Look at me—I succeeded." While the overall impact of this inspiration was uncertain, it left a deep impression on Mamun's mind!

Mamun became a scholar many times more dedicated than he had been throughout his entire life. The habit of life established by tutoring and studying for the BCS was such that when Faruk and Mamun returned from their gathering at ten at night and sat down to study together, the night passed in one stretch. They would offer the Tahajjud prayer[90], and a short time later, offer the Fajr prayer when the Azan sounded, and then go to sleep. They wouldn't wake up until around noon the next day!

Devotion transforms a person into an ascetic, and the success of an ascetic is inevitable. This time, Mamun and seven or eight members of the study circle casually made it all the way to the viva-voce. The head of Mamun's viva board was former Justice Habibur Rahman. He felt he gave a very good interview. Now began the period of waiting for everyone in the study circle.

"Mamun, dressed in a police uniform, walks with firm and quick steps down a long corridor; Police Headquarters! Mamun is about to join the SP[91] rank... has arrived. Police constables are saluting him on the veranda, and he, in turn, is returning the gesture with a military salute, advancing with resolute steps. Occasionally, several senior officers cross his path—Mamun salutes them in a perfectly disciplined manner. The corridor of the Headquarters reverberates with the stomping of police boots, the movement of Khaki[92] Uniforms, and the adjacent open flower garden is bathed in the cheerful, bright yellow light of morning. Today, Mamun has come to join as an SP."

It was exactly at that moment that the Azan (call to prayer) for Fajr broke his sleep. Energized by the vivid dream, he sat up in bed. Morning dreams come true! He praised the Almighty Allah, repeating "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar[93]" for a long time. This dream felt like an Ilham (divine inspiration)—something destined to happen! This dream carried another divine message for Mamun! If he succeeds in BCS, his life will transform completely. Fame, respect, power, and authority will elevate his life to a high stratum. But then, he wouldn't marry his maternal cousin, Mini. Mamun's mother had given her word to Mini seven years ago. Mini's conduct, conversation, actions, and devotion to Deen[94] (faith) had deeply impressed his mother. At that time, Mamun could not decide on marriage. He had his travel agency job then. How could he run a family on a salary of three thousand Taka? But the simple, trusting Mini from the mofussil (upcountry) was still waiting in hope. All her same-aged female cousins and friends were already married.

For Mamun, this was a moral obligation. Mini's elder sister recently wrote him a letter—imploring and requesting him to marry Mini with many entreaties. The divine belief that God fulfills one's own desires if one fulfills the legitimate hopes of others - utterly subdued Mamun. Yet, it was also true that if he did not succeed in BCS, it would be difficult to find a good family willing to accept him—who would marry an unemployed man?

Mamun traveled to Gaibandha to marry with only three hundred Taka in his pocket. Mamun's maternal uncle bore all the expenses of the wedding. He even gave Mamun a thousand Taka as pocket money the night before the wedding! Since they did not own a house, they stayed at his uncle's place after the marriage.

Three days later, he returned to Dhaka. The 25th BCS Preliminary Examination. And this was his last chance. He had crossed the age of thirty—the final age limit for government service has ended. He is counting the days, awaiting the final result of the 24th BCS examination.

14

A few days later, news arrived in the newspaper—the BCS results would be published the next day. Due to excitement and anxiety, he did not sleep well that night. When the Fajr Azan sounded, he went to a distant mosque to pray. After the prayer, he took a Tablighi[95] younger brother from the neighborhood and went to the Mirpur-12 bus stand to check the newspaper.

With hands trembling from excitement and apprehension, he searched for his roll number. Among the nearly thirteen hundred roll numbers, he was missing! His heart pounded with fear, his throat went dry, his vision blurred, and discharge collected in his eyes. He put the newspaper down, took deep breaths, and rubbed his eyes. He held his head and kept thinking: "This is impossible, this is impossible!" The message from the Almighty Allah—the sole Provider—delivered through the dream, could not be false. Furthermore, Mamun had married Mini based on his faith in that dream!

The younger brother, in a saddened tone, told Mamun: "Brother! Please look again." Mamun was certain his roll number was not there. Many astonishing events occur in the world—which we call "miraculous"! Perhaps, if he looked again, he would miraculously find his roll number. At the request of his pious younger brother, and with the belief that "it will be found," he meticulously searched through all twenty-eight cadres again—even though his chosen preference was Police, Administration, and Ansar!

When hope and joy depart from the heart, the body feels nearly half its weight gone. And physical and mental weakness accumulate with despair. Mamun was struggling to walk back home. A terrible fear had seized his mind. The pleasant weather of spring and the soft morning sunlight felt hot and dull. He was continuously regretting the futility of two years of inhuman labor and devotion for the BCS. The younger brother offered solace: "Brother! Don't feel so bad. Allah is with the patient; surely there is good fortune in this."

Upon returning home, he tried to sleep after eating a packet of ready-pack noodles, tea, and a cigarette. But sleep would not come, no matter what. He had only one more opportunity for the BCS. If that, too, failed, how would he survive the rest of his life? Tutoring? Or perhaps a marketing job in some fly-by-night company, devoid of rules, regulations, opportunities, and benefits? That professional life would make his existence unbearable! His bed shook with terror, the room swayed, and his mind filled with thick darkness.

He had been awake all night. He tried to sleep for a little while, but sleep did not arrive. His bed was shaking with fear. Struggling for sleep was pointless; it was more rational to tire his body and mind through work—sleep would then come naturally. He left the bed and turned on the television.

He focused his attention on a film depicting the American war in Vietnam, set against the backdrop of World War II. The gunfire, shelling, and the killing of people on both sides felt even more tragic now! Yet, these were the very things that would create excitement and thrill in the healthy mind of the cinema-loving Mamun. The final scene of the film showed a khaki-clad American spy sitting in a café. A four-bladed, antiquated ceiling fan slowly rotated above his head. The extremely bright morning light streamed

through the café window, crashing into the room. A few other people were resting nearby. Everyone was drinking and smoking. The smoke from the cigarettes, entering with the morning sun through the window, created a path resembling a stairway. The heavy smoke from the cigarettes mingled on that stairway, creating a dreamlike atmosphere—that stairway seemed to be the path to relief and liberation from all the pain and suffering of earthly life!

But the idle posture of the newcomers sitting inside the café, the silence, the smoke-filled air, and the swaying rotation of the ceiling fans—all together seemed to hold everyone captive in that room, creating a sense of suspended time. Suddenly, the main door creaked open. The brilliant light from outside flashed into the café. A short Vietnamese spy entered and stood by the door. With a rigid, fierce posture, he slowly walked toward the American military officer seated in the chair. They looked at each other. The standing Vietnamese drew a pistol from his waist and aimed it at the seated American. The seated American did not move in the slightest; he remained seated. A cigarette was in his hand, smoke curling and rising from it.

He looked up at the attacker with an expression of indifference, as if to say: "Impending death is what I deserve! What else could a helpless soldier with an intoxicated gaze do?" The assailant fired a shot aimed directly at his heart. The cigarette dropped from the dying American's hand, his head slumped to the left, and his two arms hung down at his sides. The blood from his chest snaked and trickled across the coffee-colored wooden floor.

15

In a restless state of mind, nothing brings peace. Overcoming a period of suffering is extremely difficult. He now had to prepare once again for the 25th BCS written examination. But his physical and mental malaise was debilitating everything. Mamun went to his in-laws' house to escape his solitude. A wife's advice and comfort releases the Oxytocin[96] Hormone in a husband's body. The husband becomes calm. Strength accumulates in his body and mind.

A month later, at the onset of summer, Mamun returned to Mirpur. With a body and mind feeling weightless, oscillating between hope and despair, he completed the 25th BCS written examination.

After the exam, he went back to his in-laws' village home. The heat in the village was different from the city—intensely muggy and unbearable. It was difficult to keep one's eyes open in the scorching sun of the courtyard. The blazing days necessitated bathing three to four times a day to cope. Rural electricity came and went throughout the day and night. Mamun’s days and nights passed in this manner, consumed by anxiety and apprehension.

16

About three months later, the written examination results were published. Mamun had passed again! His friend Mintu called from Dhaka to deliver the news. The moment the news was received, boundless energy coursed through his body and mind. He returned to Mirpur and began preparations for the viva-voce. This was the final examination of his working life.

It was December 2005. The government was conducting a massive crackdown across the country to suppress the so-called Islamic militancy. The atmosphere was one of palpable fear. Mamun and his devout friends collectively agreed to hand over all their books related to Islamic politics to their artist friend, Toufique. Toufique dissolved all those papers in water and used the pulp to create several canvases for his art.

Another source of restless anxiety was creeping into Mamun's mind. He had failed to sit for the M.A. Final examination in 2002, despite having prepared comprehensively. The subsequent three years had somehow been consumed by the cycle of the BCS written examination. Repeatedly, the schedules for both exams clashed at the same time! Mamun had prioritized the BCS—reasoning that the M.A. exam could be taken later.

The head of the viva-voce board was a tall, imposing, middle-aged woman with a round, full face: Professor Dr. Zinnatun Nesa Tahmida Begum, a professor from the English Department at Dhaka University, along with a Joint Secretary and a psychologist. The Professor asked the majority of the questions—all of them aggressive! The Joint Secretary's questions were routine. The examination lasted about five minutes.

Dr. Tahmida Begum flipped through Mamun's academic certificates one by one and asked: "Why didn't you appear for the M.A. Final examination?" Mamun gave a brief, regretful explanation and added: "I will finish that exam this year, inshallah." Dr. Tahmida then stated: "Your age limit for government service has ended. This is your very last BCS!" Mamun confirmed with an unusual expression: "Yes." He wanted to add that if he didn't secure this BCS, his life would be utterly disastrous. However, he kept silent, thinking that such a remark would be irrelevant and an expression of incompetence.

Again, three to four months of waiting for the results. Mamun went to his in-laws' house as he was expecting his first child. His parents were hoping for a boy. But it was a girl, resembling a Barbie doll! Mamun was even more delighted, believing that a firstborn daughter brings grace and blessing to the family.

It was the end of March. The days were hot, and the nights were cold. One morning, Mamun received a phone call. He felt a shock, like being slammed onto the ground from a height. Instantly, toxic chemical substances spread through his brain, creating confusion, sorrow, melancholy, and gloom. In a flash, the entire surroundings, full of the bright sun darkened like a total eclipse. His vision blurred. He covered his eyes with his hand and pondered: "What happens now?" His face turned ashen. He looked with vacant

eyes at his week-old daughter in his lap. He thought of all the failures in his life, past and present: "All the possibilities in my life are finished! And the life of this daughter is now uncertain too."

He somehow managed to control himself and, like a lunatic, went to the city. He searched for his roll number in the newspaper repeatedly. He did not find it. In his confusion, he searched through every single cadre list. No, it was not there! Although his preferred choices were Police, Administration, and Ansar[97]. Many astonishing disruptions happen in the world. Mamun thought: Perhaps, by mistake, my number was placed in another cadre!

From afternoon until night, calls kept coming: asking if Mamun had succeeded in the BCS. Calls from relatives, friends, and BCS batchmates—everyone. Mamun did not answer the phone for several days. He lacked the strength and courage to do so. His friend Faruk called to inform him that none of their close circle had made it either! Mamun tried to console himself: Opu, Faruk, Lenin, Mazan Bhai, Chanchal—they were all much better students than him. Even if they had not succeeded, his failure was not abnormal.

But then, there was that morning dream—the one with the divine indication. And marrying in the village to please Allah? Years of Tahajjud prayers offered night after night—all in vain? Religious practices are not prerequisites for worldly success. Success does not automatically follow a life lived like a saint or mystic. Conversely, the notion held by atheists—that man is the sole architect of his own destiny—is also not entirely correct. A person's success is judged in proportion to their hopes, aspirations, struggles, and devotion! Yet, the amount of effort and hardship required for a certain level of success is perceived differently by each individual. On top of that, there are physical, mental, and intellectual aptitudes, which are also not equal for everyone. Above all, as a person of faith, one must also maintain belief in destiny. And this destiny is half pre-determined, and the remaining half is mutable. Mamun had learned this much from reading hundreds of Islamic books and speaking with knowledgeable Islamic scholars. The subsequent six months passed sleeplessly amidst this conflict of thoughts.

His wife does not allow him to run the fan at night—fearing the baby girl might catch a cold. She does not allow him to turn off the room light; she fears her own hands and feet might accidentally hit the child.

Mamun stays awake all night, as much as his body can bear, fanning his daughter and wife with a hand fan. Babies urinate frequently—and his daughter is no exception. He tucks the four corners of a single quilt around their bodies four times, turning it from side to side—a technique his wife taught him—to use less bedding. All this happens inside the mosquito net during the intensely hot nights of July and August. His body and mind are fragile and broken from the lack of sleep. His weak, frail body and mind are filled with fear.

He ponders what his next career will be. The Azan for Fajr calls out, and he performs the prayer. Prolonged lack of sleep is never good for health. He curls up and lies down right on the prayer rug (Jāynamāz). He hopes that the Most Merciful Allah will have pity on the helpless man lying on the sacred prayer rug. May He grant him the strength to be liberated from this great calamity!

Even though his body and mind are extremely exhausted, the continuous cycle of thoughts running through his brain does not allow for complete sleep. The relentless rumination continues: If he had disregarded his elder brother's opinion and taken up lodgings at Mumu's house, he could have studied

properly and secured university admission. If he hadn't given his own pen to that student during the Jahangirnagar University viva-voce, the professor would not have been annoyed with him. If he had regularly checked the newspaper, he could have the news of recruitment and sat for the last exam of the BMA Long Course.

Mamun's Maulana friends tell him that 'if' is the insidious whisper of Satan. Regret begins with 'if'. Regret leads to self-blame. Self-blame gives rise to dissatisfaction. And dissatisfaction is the source of all mental ailments. Allah dislikes a dissatisfied person. It is necessary to remain content with whatever one has until the end of life. Otherwise, Satan gains victory over man!

In this vicious cycle of rumination, six months passed one by one. Mamun consulted with his mother-in-law. He needed some financial assistance; then he could sit for the M.A. final examination from any private university. This time, he decided to enroll in a private university—because passing is assured there. Moreover, Their results were course-based. If one failed to pass a particular course, one could re-sit the examination in the subsequent session. Furthermore, a Second Class result was mandatory for the College Lecturer Registration Examination. Achieving that under the complex, convoluted and oldest curriculum system within the National University was extremely difficult!

Mamun returned to Mirpur towards the end of December and settled in Tutul’s flat. He was encouraged to see many handsome, meritorious, and hardworking students—who had failed the accursed National University exams or only achieved Third Class—enroll at Shanto Mariam University after much searching. If Honors and Master’s students in English had to come to a private university to be certified or to meet standards, why should Mamun feel so disheartened? Several classmates comforted him: "Just finish the M.A. Final exam with focus. Once you pass the registration exam for a Lecturer post, your life will change. A college lecturer position—that is no small thing!"

Now, it became difficult to pass time in D-Block. The gatherings of friends at Raju's Hotel were no more. All his friends had secured jobs. Returning from the office at night, they were all exhausted. No one left home anymore. Moreover, most had gotten married—they had to dedicate time to their wives! Besides, Tutoring felt unbearable. He could spend the mornings and noons studying, watching TV, and sleeping. But staying indoors in the afternoon was impossible. If he went out, he would run into the younger brothers of the neighborhood. They would ask: "Why didn't Mamun secure the BCS?" "What is he doing now?" "What are his future plans?"

Nevertheless, in the dim light of winter, on a melancholic afternoon, with a constricted heart, he would quietly and lazily walk to a distant neighborhood to read the newspaper hanging on the club's wall, or he would spend the afternoon sitting at his high-school friend Kajol's elder brother's medicine shop on Ceramic Road. Sometimes, if he found a couple of talkative friends, he would chat. But those gatherings no longer held the same spirit as past days. The office anecdotes and gossip of those with jobs created dissatisfaction, discontent, and fatigue in his mind.

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Through Motin Bhai, a local new friend, the Bengali Assistant Teacher at Monipur High School[98], Mamun secured a part-time job as a residential English teacher at a Hafezia Madrasa[99] in Mohammadpur[100]. The position was that of a residential English teacher at a Hafezia Madrasa (Koran memorization school) in Mohammadpur. Food and lodging were free, and the salary was Taka 3,000. Mamun felt this was a blessing from Allah.

The new life at the Madrasa infused Mamun's life with a fresh vibrancy. He woke up abruptly with the sound of the Azan for Fajr. He tidied the mattress on the floor and offered the congregational prayer with thirty child students. Afterward, he taught them English in three shifts (classes) until 9:00 AM, followed by breakfast. When the child students went to sleep for a couple of hours, Mamun would sneak out to the adjacent neighborhood, drink a cup of tea, and smoke a cigarette [though it is prohibited extremely]! Then, after washing his hands and face and applying the perfume he kept in his pocket, he would return to the Madrasa and sleep for two hours himself! After the Dhuhr[101] prayer and lunch, he would teach again until Asr[102]. He would use the Asr prayer at another mosque in the nearby neighborhood as an excuse to secretly drink another cup of tea and smoke a cigarette!

He would spend the time until evening walking alone—through this neighborhood, that neighborhood, or along the embankment. He would offer the Maghrib[103] prayer at an outside mosque, smoke another cigarette, and return to the Madrasa. The time after evening was his own. He focused on completing his M.A. Final studies.

After dinner at ten, Mamun would pretend to be asleep while waiting for everyone else to fall asleep. The sound of snoring would begin from one of the two Huzurs [religious teachers] on the adjacent bed. Mamun would open the back door and slip out into the darkness to smoke a cigarette. There was an alley between the Madrasa and the mosque. At the far end were the urinals and latrines. He would sit there in the sudden gusts of summer air and quickly, like a thief, smoke a cigarette [consoling that Allah may forgive him for smoking at this unholy place, at least].

It was September 2007. The M.A. Final semester had concluded very well. Ramadan[104] had begun. All Madrasas close during Ramadan. Mamun bid a final farewell to the Madrasa – because the Headmaster also wants to leave him due to his money crisis. Where would he go now? His nephew, Faruk, was the Maintenance Manager at Pakiza Textile Mill[105] in Narsingdi[106]. He had suitable lodging and boarding facilities in his office quarters. Mamun, like a nomad, took a paper shopping bag and went there. He spent about a week there.

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He called Masud [his childhood friend], who was working as a Consultant for UNICEF[107]. Masud was currently on an official tour in the neighboring district of Brahmanbaria[108]. He invited Mamun to join him there. The next morning, Masud proposed that Mamun accompany him on a tour to Panchagarh[109]. Mamun enthusiastically agreed.

The two of them set off at around 11:00 AM in a black Pajero[110], adorned with the deep blue UNICEF flag. Autumn had begun. The streets of Dhaka were bright with yellow sunlight, the air was dry, and the sky overhead was clear blue. The Pajero sped along the empty highway at a tremendous speed. Mamun reflected: If life is not properly nurtured, success in life is defeated. Masud had received familial care and support, but Mamun had not. How vast was the difference in the success they achieved. One childhood friend earned a monthly salary exceeding a lakh[111] Taka [when the government highest entry level salary is Taka 6,800 only], along with a Pajero! The other friend had only three thousand Taka in his pocket [Madrasa’s one month salary] and a thick paper shopping bag as his entire worldly possession.

They paused for breaks along the way in Bogura[112], Rangpur[113], Dinajpur[114], and Thakurgaon[115]. At each district's UNICEF regional office, Masud conducted his official meetings. Mamun was overwhelmed and fascinated by the warm welcome and respect Masud received. This is what life should be! It took three or four days to reach Panchagarh. Their eyes were filled with the sight of vast green paddy fields stretching along both sides of the road. The two checked into the Panchagarh Circuit House[116]. It felt like a diplomatic lifestyle! All day was spent inspecting UNICEF's ongoing projects in the remote villages of Panchagarh; and the evenings were spent at the Circuit House. Recounting past memories, Masud's life successes, Mamun's life failures, future planning, and intellectual discourse—everything took place, like a minute analysis of life.

Masud was enchanted by the wide, flat paddy fields without any human habitation on both sides of the Panchagarh highway. The land price here was also low. He pondered for a moment and said: “Friend, we could buy quite a bit of land here. It could be cultivated. You know the sayings in Sankskrit[117]: Blessings in the wilderness!"

The minds of ambitious and creative people are always intensely active. All they need is a new goal. Returning to Mirpur, extensive discussions and practical planning. Initially, Masud would purchase 5-10 Bighas[118]. Masud would provide the investment, and Mamun would provide the labor. The profits would be split fifty-fifty.

Mamun was enthusiastic and said he would appoint his own nephew, Firoz, an unemployed Diploma holder in Agriculture, as the supervisor. He himself would move from Mirpur to Panchagarh. Simultaneously, he would try to join a college there as an English Lecturer.

Considering the vast potential for future success, Mamun regained a new spirit and a new lease on life. Masud kept saying that if the farming succeeded, they would keep increasing the land area. Along with seasonal crops, they would cultivate spices and fruits. Then, if they could acquire even more land, they

would start a tea garden, alongside raising livestock. If successful, it would launch a huge project, similar to the Kazi Farms[119] in Panchagarh. Eventually, Masud too would quit his job. Cultivation, and in their retirement, intellectual discussions with childhood friends—both would continue over there in tranquil environment under the full-moon night!

An efficient agriculturalist was needed for the farming venture. Khokon, a younger friend from the neighborhood, held a B.Sc. in Agricultural Science and had already been working as a Block Supervisor in the government's agricultural department for seven years. Masud took him into confidence. Discussions about all this were held regularly, somewhat secretly, at Raju's Hotel. One day, the opportunist younger friend, Ashraaf, suddenly appeared there! Masud, Khokon, and Mamun instantly halted their discussion.

But Ashraaf had overheard the unfinished part of the conversation. The minds of opportunists are highly inquisitive. He persistently probed and extracted the rest of the plan. Then, in his typical manipulative style, he began pleading with Masud to take him along. However, Khokon sternly warned Masud and Mamun against it privately. In Khokon's view, Ashraaf was a cursed individual. He had already cost Khokon's father over seven lakh Taka by involving him in a failed plastic bottle recycling business. He had a history of many similar misdeeds. Whatever Ashraaf laid his hands on was ruined—he was highly unlucky guy!

But the tactics of a schemer are often foolproof. Ashraaf informed Masud that his father-in-law was the Mutawalli (custodian) of a hundreds-of-bigha Waqf Estate[120] in Panchagarh. However, this land had been illegally occupied for many years.

If the land could be recovered, a massive farming operation could be established under a lease. The idea took hold in Masud's mind. Khokon and Mamun repeatedly pleaded with Masud to abandon the overly ambitious plan.

Meanwhile, Masud found a partner for this plan in his UNICEF colleague and physician, Masrur Bhai. As the son of a bureaucratic lineage, Masrur Bhai's assurance gave Masud the mental fortitude to proceed with recovering the illegally occupied Waqf Estate. Now, taking personal responsibility for Ashraaf, Masud specifically requested Mamun and Khokon to stay with the plan. When a successful man makes up his mind, it is difficult to sway him. Left with no choice, Mamun and Khokon reluctantly agreed to allow Ashraaf with them.

Masud tasked Ashraaf with securing the eviction notice against the illegal occupants from the Waqf Commissioner's office. Tutul, a master in the marketing profession, was exceptionally adept at bureaucratic work! Within a few months, the eviction notice was successfully issued. A date was set to leave for Panchagarh. For legal assistance, Mamun convinced his lawyer father-in-law to join the team. He also proposed taking Shafiul, the courageous son of his father-in-law's neighbor, the Union Parishad[121] Member, as Mamun's assistant in Panchagarh. Masud approved the proposal.

On a Taka 200 non-judicial stamp paper, five individuals—Masud, Masrur, Mamun, Khokon, and Tutul—signed a partnership agreement to launch a farming company named "Farmers World" – the title given by Masud! Masud addressed everyone, saying: "A contract is nothing but a piece of paper, unless everyone adheres to the terms of the agreement with honesty."

One morning in early Spring, 2008, Mamun set off for Panchagarh. As he crossed the Aminbazar[122] Bridge in the familiar Al-Hamra[123] transport, Mamun silently bade farewell to the Dhaka he had cherished for 26 years. He rushed toward the hope of new success in his professional life.

Below the bridge, sand-laden launches crowded the riverbank, and the laborers were unloading the sand onto their heads with vitality and energy. It was as if they were giving Mamun a sign: “He, too, would have to toil with similar labor to achieve success in upcoming life in Panchgarh.”

Upon reaching Gaibandha, Mamun showed all the Waqf Estate documents to his father-in-law. The father-in-law, who was experienced in civil law, assured Mamun: "Go! Tell Masud—I will recover the Waqf Estate myself!"

The next morning, he set off for Panchagarh with Shafiul. Panchagarh, this far? The proverbs "Delhi toh bohot door hai (Delhi is still far away)" came to mind! The journey seemed endless. They finally reached Panchagarh town around 10:00 PM.

Masrur Bhai had already arranged accommodation for them at the Panchagarh Circuit House through his administrative contacts in Dhaka. He, Masud, Tutul, and Khokon left Dhaka that night and arrived at the Circuit House the following morning. An intensive action plan was formulated. Tutul was tasked with maintaining local contacts, Mamun was assigned to coordinate all office and court activities, and Khokon was tasked with planning what kind of cultivation could be undertaken on the Waqf Estate.

After three days as guests at the Circuit House, the entire group moved their base to the Islam Hotel[124] in Panchagarh's old market. All operations were conducted from there. Within a week, they rented a house in Islambagh[125]—a two-shed tin structure with large mango and jackfruit trees and a spacious courtyard. The landlord was the Secretary of the Boda Upazila Parishad in Panchagarh. Sixty-five bighas of the Waqf Estate were illegally occupied by Hakikul Prodhan[126], a powerful land grabber in the Boda Upazila area. The fact that their landlord was an officer of the Boda Upazila Parishad felt like Allah's blessing! Mamun and the others named their rented place "Farmhouse”. This became their temporary office.

The country was under a military-backed caretaker government. The DC Office in Panchagarh conducted its daily affairs in consultation with the Area Commander of Army. Masrur Bhai took charge of liaison with the DC Office, and Mamun was tasked with coordinating with the Area Commander. Mamun, accompanied by the dispossessed Mutawalli (custodian) and Tutul's father-in-law, met with the Area Commander one night at their temporary camp in the District Stadium. Mutawalli's saintly appearance, snow-white beard, and the reflection of honesty in his eyes, combined with Mamun's fluent, high-pitched presentation, satisfied the Area Commander. He promised: "Very well! I will request the esteemed DC to ensure the recovery of the Waqf Estate."

The next afternoon, Mamun, accompanied by Ashraaf and Mutawalli, met with the esteemed DC. After hearing their statement, he assured them he would instruct the Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) to fix a date for a hearing.

The date for the hearing was set within a week. Mamun appointed his father-in-law as the lawyer for this case. On the day of the hearing, the illegal occupants of the Waqf Estate, Hakikul Prodhan and Shafiul Prodhan, appeared in the esteemed DC's chamber. The middle-aged Hakikul was tall, thin, and dark-complexioned. He looked very worried. Shafiul Prodhan, who was short, stocky, fair-skinned, and looked

affluent, was sweating and seemed agitated. They were the grandsons of the daughter's side of the Waqif (the original donor of the Waqf). The present Mutawalli, Ashraaf's father-in-law, was the grandson of the son's side of the Waqif.

The opposing lawyer representing the occupants could not stand up to the forceful arguments presented by Mamun's lawyer father-in-law. The verdict was given in Mamun's favor. An eviction order was issued within a week. A Magistrate was appointed. Masrur Bhai arranged a meeting with the esteemed female Superintendent of Police (SP). Mamun, Ashraaf, and Khokon met with the SP. She was a fair-skinned, dignified woman with a round face. She assured Mamun and the others of her full cooperation.

The Magistrate appointed to lead the eviction drive was young, sturdy, fearless, and had an honest demeanor. Mamun spent the previous night explaining to him the land records and maps for the total 105 bighas of land located in the Garinabari Union of Sadar Upazila and the Kaliaganj Union of Boda Upazila. On the appointed morning, Mamun reported to the Sadar Police Station. The Magistrate arrived there. Mamun took a seat in the police vehicle. The Magistrate's car followed closely behind. In yet another vehicle behind them were the District Revenue Officer, officials from the two Upazila Land Offices, and a surveyor.

In early mid-April (Boishakh), the convoy of vehicles sped along the village dirt roads, raising dust like a storm. Ashraaf, Khokon, Shafiul, Ashraaf's local friend Altamas, and his younger brother were waiting at the Garinabari Union intersection. With them was a truck lorry. The lorry carried necessary tools: machetes, spades, crowbars, boundary pillars, and red flags tied to bamboo poles. They also raced along, following behind. The atmosphere was electrifying. The villagers were already aware of the eviction drive. They greeted the convoy with cheers. The excitement of land recovery seemed intrinsically linked to the human spirit. In this thrilling environment, Mamun felt immense power, courage, stimulation, and a thrill—it felt like the moment before achieving ultimate success in life!

Within an hour in Garinabari Union, forty bighas of land were demarcated, and red flags were planted along the boundary of each plot. The town crier (Dholi) beat a drum to announce the eviction notice to the villagers. The occupying party, Shafiul Prodhan and his associates, had already fled in shame and fear! Their family members stood helplessly in the distance, watching the eviction process.

The convoy then raced thirty kilometers away toward the Kaliaganj Union in Boda Upazila. The villagers had already gathered around the illegally occupied land. Hakikul Prodhan, the cunning main occupier, approached the eviction force himself in a fearful, nervous manner and offered his cooperation!

The winter crop season (Rabi) had already begun. Due to constraints of time and financing, the cultivation of spices and fruits was not started. Rice was planted across the entire 105 bighas of land. Mamun had no specific tasks other than visiting and supervising the fields under the intense summer sun.

It was not feasible to manage intensive cultivation in a distant village from the Farmhouse in town. Engineer Mostak was brought in from Dhaka. He chemically processed bamboo sticks to replace steel rods. Using these, he constructed many concrete blocks. He then systematically assembled these blocks to build a spectacular two-room house. The roofs of the two rooms were topped with two domes—leading the villagers to start calling it: "Wow! It looks just like a Mosque House!"

The construction of this elaborate house consumed a massive amount of Farmers World's capital—nearly six lakh Taka! Mamun and Khokon fiercely opposed investing so much money in this house. The Waqf Estate had been leased for a maximum of three continuous years. After three years, the contract had to be renewed with Mutawalli. The matter was highly uncertain. The elderly Mutawalli could pass away in the meantime; or he could lease the land to another party.

However, the manipulative Ashraaf championed the completion of the concrete house, citing the security and prestige of Farmers World. And Engineer Mostak also agreed, driven by the desire to maintain his own impressive record! Already, twelve lakh Taka had been spent solely on the eviction process, securing the lease, and staff management. Consequently, Farmers World's capital began to run low. Masud and Masrur—both salaried employees—did not have endless supplies of cash.

Mamun's preference was to stay in the town. He had already befriended the owner of one of the town's largest libraries. Through him, he learned about a vacant post for an English Lecturer at Panchagarh Technical College. He interviewed with the young Principal and was appointed. He only had to take three classes, three days a week. He enjoyed teaching the nearly two hundred students from the Science, Commerce, and Arts departments in the large classroom.

After classes, he would return to the Farmhouse in Islambagh, eat lunch, and sleep. He had nothing much to do in the afternoons. In the evening, he would return home and wait for Shafiur. Shafiur would spend all day riding his motorcycle, supervising the two project sites, and return at night. On days when Mamun did not have class, he would accompany Shafiur on his motorcycle to inspect the two projects. To alleviate his loneliness, he brought his friend Arshad from Dhaka. Arshad had abandoned his law practice seven years ago and had been pursuing Sufism[127]—Khokon nicknamed him "Holy Father" (Sadhu Baba)! And all members of Farmers World accepted this. He became their institutional spiritual guide. He stayed indoors all day. Mamun would take him along wherever he went, except to class in his college.

There was apprehension regarding potential retaliation from the evicted occupants of the Waqf Estate, Hakikul Prodhan and Shafiul Prodhan. They had discovered that Mamun was leading the eviction effort, while the others were mostly locals. Mamun was afraid. For this reason, he never went out alone. This fear intensified one day when the Principal of his college asked him: "Are you in charge of the recovered Waqf Estate?" Mamun laughed and replied evasively: "Actually, the project belongs to my friends!" The Principal advised him: "Be careful. The Prodhans are an influential clan in Panchagarh District. They have been inquiring about you and have even reached my college!"

Shame, apprehension, and fear grew daily. What if they come to the college again to insult him? What if they stop him on his way to college? What if they spread rumors in the project area that Mamun is a land grabber? If fear cannot be contained, it inevitably increases. Lately, Mamun was afraid to sleep alone at night. Arshad had gone back to Dhaka about a month ago. Since then, Mamun stayed awake until Shafiur returned from the project site at night.

One morning, he woke up to find the new bicycle kept in the dining space was missing. The door was open. He was certain it had been stolen. The thieves had somehow managed to open the window next to the door and used a long stick to unlatch the door bolt. The people capable of stealing a bicycle—were they perhaps representatives of Shafiul Prodhan? This might be the prelude to them phoning Mamun with death threats!

Masud advised Mamun to endure staying with Mostak and Shojib in the temporary small hut in Kaliaganj until the concrete house there was ready. But taking the 10:00 AM class at the college in Panchagarh town, thirty kilometers away, was arduous from there.

The distance from Kaliaganj to Boda was ten kilometers. Only bicycles and motorcycles operate on that route. The college was another thirty kilometers from Boda town. Traveling by rickety vehicles, which stopped frequently, it took almost an hour and a half to reach! Adding to the difficulty were the storms and rain, and the local shame: Why does the Lecturer Sir live in a hut in the village?

Lately, due to storms and rain, Shafiur could not return to the Farm House almost every night. He would sleep cramped in the hut in Kaliaganj. But Mamun could not sleep all night, consumed by terror and fear. He would try to sleep with the light on. Even when drowsiness set in, he would jolt awake from the fear caused by the sound of dry jackfruit leaves falling on the tin roof. Sometimes it was the hoot of an owl. A gust of wind would make tree branches hit the tin. Was that someone? Or a cat? scratching at the wooden door of the dining space, trying to get in. Mamun suspected that it must be a thief or Shafiul Prodhan's thugs, who had come to kill him! Alternatively, could it be that they released a poisonous snake through the gaps in the veranda grill—and it entered under the wooden door to bite him?

To protect himself from snake bites, Mamun bought a heavy-duty mesh mosquito net. The ceiling fan's air hardly penetrated through this net. In the month of mid-August (Bhadra), It was difficult to sleep in the stuffy heat. He even closed the four-pane wooden window on the veranda side before lying down. What if they hang a snake from a stick and drop it onto the mosquito net? The constant stream of thoughts and counter-thoughts, conflict and suspicion, fear and dread, apprehension and doubt, anxiety and tension meant that he got no sleep at night. He would only go to sleep for a few hours once he was sure it was morning, confirmed by the sunlight entering through the gaps of the decaying old wooden window in the dark room.

As a result of months of anxiety, fear, and sleep deprivation, he frequently suffered from intense headaches. The headache started almost every day and lasted all day, unless he took Disprin[128] or Nimo[129]. He felt no motivation to study or prepare for his college lectures. With no specific work to do all day after his class, he felt dull and depressed. He had no way to go to the project site. There was only one motorcycle, and it was controlled by Altamas. Ashraaf, through various tactics and maneuvers, had convinced Masud and Masrur Bhai to appoint Altamas as Mamun's shadow-manager!

Lately, he was facing financial hardship. Based on the cunning advice of the sly Ashraaf, Masud and Masrur Bhai had stored tons of dried chillies in the dining space and the vacant room next to the Mamun's room in the Farm House. They installed six large, balck heavy-polythene bins, stacked high from the floor to the ceiling. The price of dried chillies usually increases after the end of the monsoon season. In the lone Farm house, these six large black polythene bins seemed to Mamun as like graves filled with many dead bodies in the day. The acrimonious smell spreads inside polythene bins increases the temperature in Mamun's room at night as well! Both creates suffocation too.

Following Tutul's advice, they also rented a husking yard (Chātal) and a rice mill. Before the rice harvest in Agrahayan (November-December), no one had much special work. Supervising the hundred bighas of rice fields was their only task. Hence, everyone was now busy with the trading business, and all this was happening under the leadership of Ashraaf! Consequently, all the cash flow was in his hands. He only

gave Mamun Taka 2,000 out of the fixed monthly honorarium of Taka 5,000, even though millions of Taka had been spent through Mamun's hands over the last three months.

Physically and mentally exhausted by these multifaceted problems, Mamun traveled to Rangpur and sought the counsel of the country's leading psychiatrist, Dr. Akramul Haque Tarique, MBBS, MD (Psychiatry), an Associate Professor. He took about half an hour to listen to Mamun's entire life story summary of the major events. He then reassured him, saying: "There is no cause for concern! Such problems arise from intense psychological conflict. Inshallah (God willing), it will be alright." His prescription was as follows:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
1. Fear 2. Headache 3. Sleep Loss 4. Lack of Interest 5. Loss of confidence 6. Lack of concentration 7. Stressful Life 8. Depression	(a) Losita (b) Arotril (c) Norium (d) Tafnil (to be taken if painful)	27/Aug/2008
Depression	(a) Losita (b) Arotril (c) Norium (d) Filmet Gold Multi Vitamin	30/Aug/2008
Depression	(a) Sentix (b) Arotril	08/Aug/2008

After consuming the medications for about one and a half months, the symptoms of his mental problems began to subside. His sleep improved significantly, lasting four to five hours continuously. Sleep is one of the key medicines for mental illness. However, complete recovery is difficult with medicine alone if the root problems are not solved. If luck is not favorable, one must remain melancholy.

The rice harvesting season began in Agrahayan (November-December). The rice crop on one hundred bighas of land was destroyed by the attack of the Rice Bug (Bojrāpoka). It was as if circular patches of the vast, fresh green paddy fields had been struck and scorched by lightning (Bojrāpāt). The entire country faced the same situation. The faces of everyone associated with the project were filled with gloom.

Mamun's mental illness had become noticeable to everyone, despite his attempts to conceal it, as mental health issues often generate negative perceptions. Everyone, especially Masud, urged Mamun to move to the Kaliaganj Farmhouse as soon as possible. The rice harvest was imminent. Mamun's close supervision of the entire harvesting process was crucial. Managing such work by commuting daily from the town to

the village was impossible. Furthermore, spending twenty-four hours engaged in work and surrounded by friends would aid Mamun's mental recovery.

The necessity and the logic were sound. The problem was fear. The opposition had already learned that Mamun was the project director. The house of one of their adversaries, Hakikul Prodhan, was only 500 yards behind Mamun's concrete Farmhouse. Living and moving around right in the enemy's backyard was not a wise move. Two of Mamun's friends—Mostak and Shojib—and Mamun's assistant Shafiur were residing there regularly. Khokon visited once a month from Dhaka. Masud and Masrur Bhai came only once every three or four months. But the major issue was the presence of the untrustworthy Ashraaf. Mamun believed that staying at the new Farmhouse would give Ashraaf an opportunity to cause him immense harm!

Despite the pressure, Mamun went to Kaliaganj for a trial stay of two or three days. The rice harvest had begun. Paddy sheaves were being brought from the fields behind the Farmhouse and stacked in heaps. The fresh, earthy scent of rice permeated the air. An application for rural electricity had been filed, but securing the connection would take more time. Work was being conducted under the limited light of Engineer Mostak's solar power system. In Panchagarh, the cold settled in fully by November. Fog accumulated everywhere, creating a sense of stillness. The bluish-white light of the solar tube lights mixed with the fog, creating a magical haze. Small and large insects by the hundreds and thousands had entered the Farmhouse. They had never seen so many insects anywhere else! These monstrous pests were the ones that had destroyed this year's harvest. Wherever there was light, they gathered in swarms. To avoid their their collective onslaught, all activities had to be conducted inside the mosquito nets. With all these, it was a terrifying situation!

If a problem cannot be solved, the best solution is to distance oneself from it. Just as winter was beginning across the country, Panchagarh was struck by severe cold in the last week of November! Bathing without hot water was impossible. One could not go outside without an umbrella. The dense, heavy fog fell like rain. Clothes would get damp within 15–20 minutes of being outside.

The destruction of the most harvest on 100 bighas of land, the college closing for winter break, the continuous insistence on moving to Kaliaganj, the uncertainty of cultivating spices and fruits in the next season due to financial crisis, and the dreadful cold—all combined to leave Mamun in a physically and mentally pitiable condition. In the last week of November, he abandoned the Farm House in Islambagh. He informed everyone at the college and the project that he was taking leave and left for Gaibandha. Secretly, he had decided not to return to Panchagarh!

Dr. Akramul Haque Tarique consulted in Gaibandha every Friday, making it easy for Mamun to meet him. After a month and a half, some improvement in his mental state was visible. In the fourth consultation, the doctor made some changes to the medication in his prescription:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
Depression	(a) Mirtag (b) Serolux (c) Cloron	20/Nov/2008

	(d) Gingoba (Ginseng/Natural Vitamin) (e) Filmet Gold/Multi Vitamin	
Depression	(a) Sentix (b) Arotril	27/Nov/2008
Depression	(a) Sentix (b) Arotril (c) Filmet Gold/Multi Vitamin	26/Dec/2008

After a month, the doctor reduced the dosage of several medicines. His recovery continued. However, his power of thought and intellectual capacity became so weak that he could only wanted to sleep. His body grew fatigued from constant sleeping. The date for the NTRCA Examination[130] for the Lecturer in English position was set. However, Mamun completely lacked the physical and mental strength to travel to Dhaka to take that exam. The winter in Gaibandha was also quite severe! On a bitterly cold morning, Mamun told his wife: "Listen! The Lecturer Registration exam is tomorrow. I have to go to Dhaka to take it." His wife said: "Go." Mamun, with a trembling voice, pale face, and hesitant tone, said: "I haven't been able to prepare at all for the exam! It will just be pointless hardship to go. Let's skip it." His wife, with a voice full of compassion, said: "Stay then! Rest. First, get completely well—then you can do many things in life."

His wife's advice immediately triggered the release of Oxytocin hormone in Mamun's body! Comforted, Mamun curled up under his wife's blanket, covering his face. But he had a strong desire to take the registration exam—at least to be present!

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It was the end of winter, the beginning of a new spring. Almost all the symptoms of his mental illness had subsided. Only the melancholy remained; and occasionally, his heart pounded with fear: “What will happen to my daughter? Financial stability for parents is crucial for a child's future. Mamun was 35, yet still unable to earn. Time passed with him lying down, sitting, and pacing all day and night. His daughter was growing up—very lively, intelligent, and beautiful. She was three years old, yet she spoke with such maturity! Seeing her father lying in bed even at high noon, she would climb onto his bed. Then, lifting her father's head onto her tiny chest, she would lovingly repeat: "Papa! You sleep. Papa! You sleep."

The slightly warm afternoon light fell upon the father and daughter. Was this a signal for the start of a new life? Mamun envisioned the future: “His daughter, now a teenager, skinny, tall, and beautiful! Dressed in a cheap, drab, faded white shalwar kameez[131]. She rushes in, arguing angrily with her father: ‘Papa! You haven't given me anything. You've left me in this rotten village. You're sending me to a broken-down village school. My future is dark! I will leave home one day!"

Mamun had enrolled his brother-in-law, Babul, in a private Textile Engineering college in Dhaka. Babul was studying in his final year of the Diploma course. One day, Babul took Mamun's resume. He sent it to his Textile Engineering classmate, Rabbi. Rabbi's father was a Director of a Group of Industries. He called Mamun to Dhaka and arranged an interview with the Group's Executive Director. Mamun secured the job! He was appointed as Trainee Executive in the Human Resource Management division at the Group's garment industry in Hotapara, Gazipur[132]—with a salary of just Taka7,000! Mamun was content with this. With new resolve, and hoping to start a new life, he once again left his eternal Dhaka for Gazipur.

Hotapara is essentially a small industrial area located inside the Bhawal National Park[133] in Gazipur. Mamun moved into a small room on the fifth-floor rooftop of the Isa Chowdhury Tower in Monipur Bazaar, sharing it with a colleague who was an accounts officer. Looking around from the rooftop, all one could see was a dense forest of Sal Ttrees[134] (Gojāri). In the beginning of spring, the morning light illuminated the new green leaves of all the trees, creating a verdant world! The view was the same when standing on the factory roof. Every morning, the calls of the cuckoo and the chirping of various birds filled his heart with joy. The pure, healthy nature, environment, and air of the Bhawal Gorh (region) gradually made Mamun strong and healthy again. After two years of working with indomitable enthusiasm, dedication, and patience, he was promoted to Senior Executive, with a doubled salary. Two years later, he became an Assistant Manager, with his salary nearly doubling again. He had a long way to go. He enrolled in an LLB[135] course at a private university for further professional advancement.

He became a favored officer of the Executive Director. As a devout Muslim who offered all five daily prayers, Mamun would lead the Jamaat (congregational prayers) for Zuhr, Asr, and Maghrib in the office whenever no one else was available. The Executive Director and the Managing Director also prayed in that Jamaat! The Executive Director, Nabi-us-Salim, affectionately granted Mamun leave one day a week

for two years to properly attend his LLB classes. He encouraged Mamun to bring his family to Gazipur and enroll his daughter in the Rajendrapur Cantonment Public School[136].

Malicious people exist everywhere. There were four Assistant Managers in the same department, led by Mir Salam. He was intimidated by everyone's work performance! Mir Salam began employing various tactics and conspiracies to suppress everyone else. The Executive Director, either knowingly or unknowingly, continued to support him to maintain departmental leadership. Lately, the Executive Director was keeping Mamun at a distance. He suddenly stopped the practice of driving Mamun with him in his car to pray to Zuhr, Asr, and Maghrib at the mosque adjacent to the factory, a practice they had maintained until then. He began gradually redistributing Mamun's responsibilities among other junior officers. He also limited his conversations with Mamun.

Within six months, the situation became unbearable. Mamun had never before faced such a crisis in his professional life. A crisis of thought began. Mental stress increased. Anxiety set in. He began suffering from sleep disturbances at night. His psycho-biological drive decreased. It is always difficult for a husband to explain his problems to his wife. Discord began in Mamun's conjugal life. The situation at the office and home started spiraling out of control. Mamun, feeling helpless, simply endured. At the end of six years in their job, all four colleagues were expecting promotions. The department head, Mir Salam, was promoted from Deputy Manager to Manager, but none of the others were promoted!

Mamun had already understood that he would not be promoted. For that reason, he had secretly applied and taken exams at another factory. He also had an offer awaiting him to join there as a Manager. The day he received only the annual salary increment letter, he decided to resign from his current job. It was not easy to inform the Executive Director, who had initiated his career, about his resignation. After waiting for several opportune moments, he finally succeeded. The Executive Director, too, accepted his resignation letter easily.

Leaving a first-class garment factory to join a third-class factory, driven purely by anger, the lure of a title, and the hope of a higher salary, did not prove to be a happy experience. The owners of this company were all Indian Hindus. Only the Executive Director lived in the country—the rest were abroad. Indians, particularly Hindus, tended to look down upon Bangladeshis. They also maintained a higher standard of physical appearance. They were highly suspicious—always fearing that the Bangladeshi officers and employees might cause them immense harm. An environment of mistrust is never healthy.

The pervasive irregularities, corruption, mismanagement, and labor unrest began to profoundly disturb Mamun. It was impossible for him alone to resolve these issues. A trade union operated in the factory. The management forcibly dismissed several workers who were union members, including one pregnant female worker!

One evening, about ten thugs and miscreant workers abducted Mamun from the Maleker Bari bus stand! They took him to a secluded part of Morogakhal[137] village near Maleker Bari. He realized the fear of death. With the permission of his captors, he was only allowed to call his wife for a quick prayer. His wife recognized from his voice that something dreadful was happening to her husband! She simply reassured him: "Listen! Nothing happens to a good person. Keep your head cool."

The union members presented Mamun before their leader. The leader was a very gentle young man—wearing a beard, skullcap, Panjabi-Pajama, and having a Tablighi appearance. Mamun had a good reputation among the workers for his fair treatment. The labor leader easily recognized this after speaking with him. He only requested Mamun to ensure that the legally due payments for the dismissed workers were settled.

Mamun did not go to the office the next day. He informed the Indian Executive Director about everything over the phone. He went to the office the day after and held a long meeting with him. Mamun stated: "It is no longer possible for me to work here." The Executive Director readily accepted the situation. Mamun made efforts and, within a month, joined one of the top ten garment manufacturing companies in the country—albeit as an Assistant Manager. What else could he do? Saving his life was mandatory!

This Group had a highly advanced Human Resource Management system. Job security was excellent. The two disadvantages were the lack of facilities for officers and irregular promotions and salary increases. No officer below the AGM[138] rank had air conditioning in their room. Mamun also could not utilize the company's microbus service for commuting, as the vehicle traveled from Dhaka to Naowozo, Gazipur. Mamun's residence, Rajendrapur Cantonment, was in the opposite direction.

Winter concluded smoothly. However, working in the scorching heat of summer became difficult. Mamun and three officers under him, along with the accounts department staff, shared one rectangular room. A photocopier machine was situated near the door on one side, and a pantry on the other. Consequently, workers and employees constantly moved in and out of the room throughout the day. It felt like the Jatrabari bus stand[139]!

It was constantly crowded and filled with shouting and commotion. The room was also adjacent to the production floor. Furthermore, the room had sliding glass doors, which meant they could not be kept shut all the time mechanically. In garment factories, music must be played constantly throughout the day to keep the workers motivated. But the music played was not to Mamun's taste! It was difficult to concentrate on work amid all that noise pollution. His subordinate officers constantly shouted like gatekeepers, telling workers to close the door whenever anyone entered or left the room.

The decommissioned baby taxis from the 1980s ran from Nawjore to Chandana Chowrasta[140]. The fare was five Taka. Auto-rickshaws cost ten Taka, and cycle-rickshaws twenty Taka. To save money, he would ride the baby taxi. He had to rush and shove his way into the crowded vehicle. From Chandana, he took a minibus or tempo to Rajendrapur Chowrasta. From there, he took a tempo, CNG[141], or auto-rickshaw to the RP Gate Bazar[142]. To save ten Taka in rickshaw fare and to get some exercise, he walked the fifteen-minute path to the DGFI[143] Checkpoint. Commuting like this, breaking the journey down into multiple legs, he spent nearly three hours every day, sweating profusely.

When extremely disliked circumstances return again and again in life, people naturally lose hope. Repetitive thinking begins in an attempt to escape the repetitive crisis. This gives rise to anxiety. Constant anxiety exhausts a person. This was more acute for Mamun, because his past life was filled with a history of such recurring crises repetitively!

Mamun's five-story garment factory was located on the south side of the road. On the north side were several brick kilns. The intense heat of the month of Joistho (May-June), thick smoke, the smell of

burning coal, and fine specks of ash pervaded the area. Mamun kept the windows behind his back open. The south wall of every floor of the factory had eight large exhaust fans installed for air circulation. The strong suction of those fans drew in the external smoke, the burning smell, and the ash through the windows.

Every morning, after a three-part journey, enduring the commuting hassle and high sound pollution, he arrived at the office, sweaty, irritated, and bitter in body and mind. Sitting in the chair by the window, he thought every day: "At 41 years old, Mamun should have a much better job, at least one where he could commute in the office car."

The financial hardship was gone now; but the hardship of the mind remained.

When a person sees darkness in their future, they try to cast a light on the darkness of their past to find out: “Where were their mistakes?”

Mamun's rumination began in the same way: If he had lodged at Mumu's house, if he had approached the Jahangirnagar University viva-voce with a firm personality, if he had bought an ISSB guide and prepared fully, if he had paid attention to the last BMA Long Course recruitment circular, if he hadn't had the travel agency job, if he had bought a guide and prepared well for the Sub-Inspector written exam, if he had overcome his hesitation during the BCS viva-voce and requested Dr. Tahmida Begum to consider that his age limit for government service was ending, if he had maintained his leadership as a contracted director in the Panchagarh project and held onto the college lecturer post, if he hadn't quit the Hotapara job abruptly out of anger; then he wouldn't have to work in a laborer's environment today!

As long as these thoughts persist, the melancholy feeling keeps swirling in the mind. Eventually, it turns into rumination. When afflicted by rumination, various mental and physical problems begin. Self-confidence diminishes, leading to the feeling that nothing good will ever happen in the future! His mood weakened, and he found no enthusiasm or motivation for any work. Anxiety began: Will success not even come in this fourth-class garment job? In Hadith, the Arabic word "Laow" is said to be the whisper of Satan. The unanswered, repetitive questions involving so many "Ifs" began to haunt Mamun with a sense of guilt. After all, he had pursued excellence, income, improvement, success, fame, honor, and power all his life!

Meanwhile, he had already registered as an apprentice lawyer with the Bar Council. He had started law coaching every Friday near the Gazipur Judge Court to prepare for the license exam. The job felt so depressing, drab, and annoying that Mamun tried to convince his wife to move to Gaibandha with the family. Then he could work as an assistant to his father-in-law and earn some money, and attend law coaching in the evenings. But his wife refused to return to Gaibandha under any circumstances.

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One autumn, Mamun went to the BIRDEM[143] General Hospital for his wife's sinusitis treatment. He noticed a sign there announcing that a Psychiatry Department would soon be inaugurated. BIRDEM's advanced medical management, healthy work environment, and affordable cost were commendable. Mamun waited for that opportunity. After his wife's next appointment, he went to the newly formed Psychiatry Department on the 16th floor. He met a fair-skinned, round-faced, spectacled, medium-built, beautiful female doctor. With a very composed, gentle, and compassionate voice, she meticulously listened to the brief history of Mamun's entire life. She was Dr. Nasim Jahan, MBBS, FCPS (Psychiatry), Assistant Professor and Head of the Department.

She was the first person to reassure Mamun, informing him: "You are suffering from OCPD (Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder). This trait is a blessing for people—if this characteristic can be used in a positive way. This trait is often found among the world's most learned, artists, writers, poets, philosophers, and Sufi mystics!"

With these words, she became a blessing in Mamun's life. For the first time, he took his illness positively.

The prescription she provided:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
1. Lack of Confidence 2. Low Mood 3. Worry 4. Guilty Feelings 5. Repetitive Thinking 6. Perfectionism	1. Esipram 2. Clonatril 3. Xytrex	22/Oct/2016

The medicines for psychiatric treatment work surprisingly well—Mamun had experienced this before, having taken medication from that young BCS physician before quitting his job at IDCOL; and from Dr. Akramul Haque Tarique, while in Panchagarh. Within a few weeks of regularly taking just three medicines prescribed by Dr. Nasim, Mamun began to regain enthusiasm, motivation, and energy in his body and mind. The adverse work environment at the office no longer felt as monotonous as before! The exhausting and unbearable commute did not seem so difficult.

The prescription from his next appointment:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date

Sometimes Headache	1. Esipram 2. Xynex 3. Extra Salt not allowed	22/Dec/2016
Advice	1. CBC & ESR 2. S. Creatinine 3. SGPT 4. RBS 5. Urine R/M/E 6. ECG	

Mamun worked with full vigor for the next year. After eighteen months, he was promoted to Deputy Manager based on his work performance. His law coaching progressed very well. After about a year, he met with Dr. Nasim Jahan again. The physician was very happy to see Mamun's physical and mental improvement! Except for occasional headaches, he had no other problems now.

This time's prescription:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
1. Headache 2. Improving other symptoms	1. Esipram 2. LK	07/Sep/2017

Mamun continued to fully perform his job and domestic responsibilities with a healthy, strong body and mind for another year. He met with Dr. Nasim Jahan again, as per his routine follow up.

This time's prescription:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
1. On Rx for GAD	1. Esipram	16/Aug/2018
GAD: Generalised Anxiety Disorder		

Household expenses had increased. He had also admitted his son to Rajendrapur Cantonment Public School. His daughter was in the sixth grade. He had been working at the Nawjore job for almost three years, but there was no indication of when the next promotion or salary increment would happen. His body and mind were now fully healthy and stable. Therefore, he could risk changing jobs again. This was the easiest way to increase salary and position in the RMG[144] sector—by changing jobs every few years!

Taking leave in the garment industry is difficult. There is a saying here: "Garment shipment will happen even on the day before Qiyamah (Judgment Day)!" Audits and inspections from foreign buyers were

constant. The factory was always in a state of war. Amidst this, he secretly attended several interviews. He secured a job in Sreepur, Gazipur—fifteen kilometers east of the Dhaka-Mymensingh road, in a rural area. However, an office car was provided for commuting. The salary was Taka 70,000, and the position was Assistant General Manager (Administration, Human Resources, and Compliance)! His responsibilities included overseeing four factories in total: Knitting, Dyeing, Printing, and Garments.

The sudden increase of twenty thousand Taka in salary was a significant opportunity for career advancement! However, while the MD (a BUET[144] Engineer) seemed gentle during the interview, the Chairman's massive, robber-like appearance created an apprehension in Mamun's mind. The company's GM, a BUTEX[145] Engineer, was small, handsome, and devout. Assured by him, Mamun finally joined the company.

Often, apprehensions lead to detrimental outcomes. The same happened at the new company. No officer or employee was happy with the Chairman's foul temper, reckless behavior, constant shouting, anxiety, rage, abuse, and mismanagement. People ultimately work out of helplessness. Mamun realized that it would not be possible for him to work for long with this erratic and nearly insane owner. But one cannot simply change jobs whenever one wants. The mental pressure, anxiety, tension, and fear began to increase daily.

As the Head of Compliance, it was Mamun's ethical responsibility to implement the labor laws and buyer compliance standards (COC) [146] in the factory. However, the Chairman was absolutely unwilling to grant workers their earned leave, maternity benefits, or compensation benefits. He pressured Mamun to create fabricated documents to pass the international audit, BSCI[147]. Without this certification, direct foreign buying orders could not be secured. The factory was currently operating on contract work. Nevertheless, Mamun, with only two subordinate officers, proceeded with the final preparations for the audit.

The audit preparations were completed in three months. However, the fear that the fabricated documents might be exposed during the audit, the lack of confidence in passing, and the resulting fear of losing his job terrified Mamun! His self-confidence waned. Lack of self-confidence causes physical and mental weakness. To escape the problem, the brain automatically goes into overdrive.

But mere thinking does not provide a solution. This leads to apprehension, and apprehension leads to anxiety. Anxiety causes a reduction in appetite and night sleep. Consequently, daytime work performance decreases. These symptoms began to manifest acutely in Mamun again! The moment the office landline or mobile phone rang, his heart would pound violently with fear. He feared the monstrous Chairman would call and shout unnecessarily: "Mamun! When will the BSCI audit be? Why is it taking so long? I want the audit results now. You understand?"

He would sit on his wooden chair after lunch and doze off. The combination of drowsiness and fear created a strange state of lethargy. He would stare with blurred eyes through the glass sliding door towards the floor in front. On the fifteen-thousand-square-foot floor, there were only six sewing lines in one corner. The presence of only 200 workers seemed extremely sparse. Five-sixths of the remaining floor was empty. The rattling sound of the sewing machines echoed off the shiny tiles of the empty floor. The floor glowed under the light of the LED bulbs hanging from the Bus Bars[148]. The sound of the sewing machines and the flashing lights seemed jointly to leap and raise their hoods, advancing towards Mamun's

glass room. He would startle in fear! The "snakes" seemed to be the Chairman's spies—coming to see what Mamun was doing sitting in his office with laziness and drowsiness!

Mamun realized that his mental health was deteriorating day by day. All enthusiasm for life was lost. At the end of winter, he helplessly sought out Dr. Nasim Jahan again. She asked, somewhat surprised: "Why did you relapse into this state?" After hearing everything, she stated that Mamun's lifelong history of ups and downs, along with his physical and mental composition, were responsible for this deplorable state. Therefore, he must always try to avoid adverse situations.

She increased the dosage of his previously ongoing medication and added three new medicines:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
1. Fearfulness 2. Loss of Confidence 3. General Weakness 4. Loss of Sleep & Appetite	1. Esipram 2. Mirex 3. Indever 4. Clonitril	11/Mar/2019

The new medicines brought some improvement in his weakness, insomnia, and loss of appetite; but the terror did not disappear. And the increase in self-confidence—that remained an elusive goal. To avoid "adverse situations," Mamun began searching for a new job again. After every prayer, he earnestly begged to Allah, the Provider of Sustenance, to rescue him from this great calamity. He increased his Remembrance of Allah (Zikir) at all times. Sometimes reciting, "Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un" (Indeed, to Allah we belong and to Him we shall return), sometimes, "Hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakeel, wa ni'mal mawla wa ni'mannasir" (Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best guardian, the best protector, and the best helper), and sometimes just, "Astaghfirullah, Astaghfirullah, Astaghfirullah" (I seek forgiveness from Allah)—he continued reciting these prayers and invocations!

All spiritual practices certainly yield good results. Within a few months, he secured a new job! Though, the salary was fifteen thousand Taka less than the present job!

The elderly Director was aristocratic, gentle, and an entrepreneur from one of the country's top garment manufacturers. The CEO[149], on the other hand, was young, handsome, and an M.Sc. Industrial Engineer from SUST[150]. Furthermore, this factory was located near Mamun's residence, in Bagher Bazaar, near Safari Park.

Within four months, Mamun resigned from the job with the uncivilized, immoral, drunkard, and semi-mad Chairman and joined the new company. Two weeks after he started, a BSCI follow-up audit was underway. An email arrived from another buying house asking for some good photographs of every section of the factory. For valid reasons, Mamun asked for time until the afternoon. Officials from buying houses always behave like masters over the factory. This case was no exception. The email sender forwarded Mamun's email to the CEO. The CEO bellowed over the mobile phone—as if lightning had struck his head. Mamun was stunned! That face, and this scream – two do not go together?

Mamun knew this was all part of the corporate culture—most of it was acting, and the entire thing was a drama. Due to a lack of sound management practices, most officers and employees endure such threats

and shouting throughout their entire careers. Mamun showed no reaction, merely stating in a flat tone: "Alright, Sir. I will arrange for the officer to send the photos."

Mamun had already been suffering from a mental breakdown for about five months, which was why he had changed jobs, accepting a lower position and less salary at this company. On top of that, the CEO's uncivilized screaming, hidden behind a gentle appearance, was deeply imprinted on Mamun's mind. He became disgusted with the job. He was constantly apprehensive: Any minute now, the prim CEO with the civilized face might start screaming incoherently and uncivilizedly over the mobile phone.

Ramadan began. Over the past thirty years, he had only broken one fast—for taking medicine for an earache. Fasting during a mental illness was even more difficult. But Allah is the Great Healer. During Ramadan, he felt tremendous guilt about shaving his beard. This was because growing a beard is considered Obligatory (Wajib). However, after two weeks, his beard and mustache would start itching. His face would feel heavy. And when his beard became visible, he felt his colleagues were all saying: "What's up, Huzur (Religious Man)? What's the news?"

In the middle of Ramadan, after Iftar, he shaved his beard and mustache! One fear gives birth to another fear. And that fear is sometimes all-consuming. The guilt of shaving his beard put pressure on his mind.

“A dreadful, murky light revealed a distant horizon line. Two small, bat-like figures were dancing there. They were naked. Their aerial acrobatics were extremely bizarre. Seeing Mamun from a great distance, the two bat-men leaped and flew toward him in a wave-like motion. Then, after several flip-flops, they stood on the ground and congratulated Mamun—just as performers do after a successful circus act! Their contemptuous faces were cackling with laughter, and their body language seemed to be saying: "You've done well this Ramadan, brother! You are a man in great distress, you seek Allah's help, and yet you commit sins [shaving beard]?"

Mamun woke up in a state of panic! Nightmares usually occur towards the end of the night. In the profound silence of the late night, the elderly Muazzin [caller for Salah] was calling people for Sehri (pre-dawn meal) through the loudspeaker, his voice clear, sleepy, and compassionate. Consumed by extreme disinterest, endless fatigue, self-blame, fear of an uncertain future, hopelessness, and physical inertia, Mamun realized that the situation was worsening day by day. Not all doctors are suitable for all diseases. Dr. Nasim Jahan's medicines have worked wonderfully for the past three years! But they are failing now. He needed to consult another experienced physician. Perhaps with his long experience and wisdom, he could prescribe a fitting and sustainable medicine!

20

One of the great wonders of the universe is the human brain. And to Mamun, his own brain was a profound mystery!

This incident took place twenty-eight years ago. An isolated event that Mamun had no direct involvement in—he only happened to know about it. It was back when Mamun lived for about six months in a "mess" (shared lodging) in Mirpur’s A-Block.

It was the day after he moved in. At noon, Mamun was reading a story by Imdadul Haq Milan[151]. The entire mess was empty; no one was around. Just then, a fellow mess-member returned from the office for lunch. His room was next to Mamun's. Human being is naturally drawn to be closer during solitude, so instead of going to his own room, the mess-member came into Mamun’s room.

Mamun sat up from where he was lying. With a smiling face and a clear, generous, and charming voice, the man spoke up, "Brother! Did you move into our mess yesterday?"
Mamun naturally extended his hand and replied, "Yes, brother! You stay in the middle room, don't you? Sit, please sit." As he spoke, Mamun gestured toward another wooden bedstead in front of him. Aside from these two beds, there was no other furniture in the room.

Mamun introduced himself. The other man shared his name: Shafiq. He wanted to know where Mamun had lived before. Mamun openly shared that after his elder brother’s family moved to Savar, he had no place to stay, so he moved into this mess. This was his first experience of "mess life."

Shafiq mentioned it was his first time living in a mess as well. His home district was Sirajganj. After completing his BSc there, he had come to Dhaka in search of a job. But are jobs easy to find? For the past two years, he had been getting by through private tutoring while applying for jobs. However, he no longer tutored. The life of a tutor had made him mentally ill. Now, he had taken a job as a worker in a garment factory—a Quality Inspector. He spent all day cutting excess threads from finished garments! He even pulled some a thread-cutter out of his pocket to show.

Surprised, Mamun asked, "How did that happen? I also survive by tutoring! Where did you use to tutor?"

In a dry voice, he said, "I taught right here in E-Block."

Mamun exclaimed with curiosity, "Wait, brother! I lived in E-Block for seven long years!"

Shafiq also became eager. He asked, "Do you know a girl named Nina?"

With a slight smile, Mamun replied, "Yes! All the boys in the neighborhood are crazy for that girl."

He let out a heavy sigh. As the air left his chest, his face turned somewhat dark, and his posture slumped slightly. Shafiq was of a dark complexion, with a firm, solid build. His face was broad, masculine, and attractive. His clean-shaven face radiated an overwhelming sense of kindness. His hair was cut short and curly—an army-style crop.

Refilling his empty lungs with a deep breath, Shafiq said in a despairing voice, "Mamun Bhai, you know Nina? How strange! In that case, let me tell you everything openly."

Saying this, he pulled four or five types of tablets and capsules from the pocket of his arum-leaf-green gabardine pants and displayed them one by one on his palm for Mamun to see.

He said with a hint of agitation, "Do you know, brother? A psychiatrist gave me these medicines! After taking them for a year, I’m much better now. I had gone completely mad. Totally brain-out! Understand? I couldn't sleep. Only Nina's image spun in my head. Nina's body, Nina's beauty, Nina's terrifying sexual arousal, Nina clutching me, Nina scratching me, Nina biting me!"

Hearing this much, Mamun became scared. He asked in a frightened voice, "Shafiq Bhai! What are you saying?"

Shafiq then began to speak from the heart, recounting his romance with Nina from beginning to end: getting appointed as Nina’s private tutor through a senior brother of the neighborhood, the sincerity that grew while teaching, and how that turned into intimacy. Then came the touching, the holding of hands, the embracing, and then the kissing — everything used to happen right there at the study table!

A deep romantic relationship lies hidden in the depths of the male and female body. The ultimate mystery of love is concealed within the physical form. Sexual desire born of love eventually seeks a path to its final destination. Nina and Shafiq also became desperate to find that path. Finally, Shafiq found a lead — the house of a sister-in-law from Sirajganj who lived in the Mirpur Cantonment.

In the morning, instead of going to school, Nina would go and stand in front of Anik Plaza at the Mazar-11 bus stand. She would quickly get into the rickshaw that Shafiq had already arranged, and then head straight to that sister-in-law’s house.

The sister-in-law would welcome them. For the first few days, it was just a love-chat in the living room. Then, an open door but in a secluded room. Finally, casting all shame aside, they moved to a room with a closed door. The two would indulge in wild sexual acts!

Shafiq’s eyes and face glowed with the expression of deep and frenzied sexual activity. He described how Nina would clutch Shafiq’s robust body in a wild, frantic, and fierce manner; how she enjoyed the sexual union for much longer than usual. How she would repeatedly and desperately beg him to push his iron-rod-like penis deeper and deeper into her vagina. She would request him to push faster and harder. Even after thirty minutes, when she hadn't reached Orgasm[152], she would pounce on Shafiq like a tigress, clutching him, scratching him—and biting Shafiq's neck, face, and throat!

Then came the final stage, the last unearthly joy—her Orgasm would occur! Nina and Shafiq's naked bodies would be drenched and merged in sweat. The bedsheet would be creased, crushed, and wrinkled—and on that white sheet with blue floral patterns, Nina’s transparent, slippery, and odorless Fluid[153] from

multiple Orgasms would be smeared! Everything—all of it—Shafiq described with such deep, emotion-laden expression that a perpetual blue-film seemed to play before Mamun's eyes for two and a half hours: and only then did it end!

After finishing this detailed description of the romance, Shafiq said with a tone of satisfaction, "Brother, she was extremely crazy—a total sex maniac! She would often flee from school and come to Anik Plaza. I would ask her with a smirk, 'How many times today?' She would turn red and say in a casual manner, 'As many times as you want!' Even after everything was over between us, she would sleep face-down on the bed for a long time as if she were dead. The afternoon would pass by. The sister-in-law would knock on the closed door and say jokingly, 'Hey girl! How much longer are you going to lie there like a sticky mess?'"

Now Shafiq became calm. In a voice of despair, he said, "Brother! These are very bad addictions, you know? Even while teaching at their house, my mind wouldn't stay right. One evening, sitting at the study table, I was sucking her mouth. I didn't even realize that her aunt was in the house. Suddenly, my eyes caught her aunt's eyes in the distance. A short distance away, she was standing still like a statue, watching our misdeed!"

"Terrified and shaken, I ran outside, trembling. From that day on, all contact between us was permanently cut off. Her going to school was stopped as well. I never found out what happened to her. And my own life—work, movement, everything—became completely disordered. In the end, I couldn't even sleep. I was admitted to Pabna Mental Hospital[153] for six months."

This story of romance had not had much impact on Mamun's life over the last twenty-eight years. But for some unknown reason, recently, the descriptions, imagery, and fantasies of that event have awakened in his head like a terrifying storm! It is as if the wild sexual acts of Nina and Shafiq are happening inside his head! The tremors of the final stage of the sexual act that took place twenty-eight years ago, the movement of their bed because of those tremors, the creaking sound of the bed, the rubbing of two bodies, the squelching sound of two genitals, Shafiq's moaning, and Nina's screaming—everything, everything is happening right in the middle of Mamun's brain. Those extremely exciting sexual images, sexual sounds, and sexual atmosphere left Mamun's brain profoundly obsessed.

Waking up in the morning, the same fantastical pornographic images, blue-films, and the screams and shudders of sexual frenzy run through his head! Morning turns to noon, noon passes into afternoon, then evening, and then at night until just before going to sleep, the same film continues to play in his head. Mamun cannot get this terrible preoccupation out of his head by any means. Chanting, Meditation, or any other divine thoughts—nothing brings relief. Even while standing for prayer (Salah), the same thoughts swirl! Mamun slumped down, overwhelmed by a sense of guilt. To lighten his heart, he finally told his wife about this obsession in a shy manner!

His wife said in a scolding tone, "When, who, and what mischief happened—why are these thoughts running through your mind? Besides, in love and affection, these things naturally happen. You haven't done any of this. So why are you worrying so much?"

Mamun continued to analyze the situation from various perspectives. Was this preoccupation a sudden explosion of the human mind's unrepressed, hidden desires? Did its source lie buried within his fourteen

long years of private tutoring? During that extensive time, he had taught many beautiful female students, most of whom were fond of him. However, to maintain his honesty, faithfulness, and strength of character, he never strayed down a wrongful path. Many students had offered him their love, but Mamun rejected them all through hints, gestures, and words.

Now, in this dim, wave-less, melancholy, and monotonous life, are those hidden sexual desires rearing their heads again due to a weakness in Mamun’s consciousness? What a misfortune! How, where, and when can he find a way to escape this?

Amidst such terrible sexual preoccupation, Ramadan ended! Mamun is sitting in the first row of the mosque for the Eid prayer. He is listening to the Imam's holy Eid sermon. Yet, inside his head, all the ugly and hideous acts of Nina and Shafiq's sexuality are swirling! Nina's slender, sexually desirable body, her snow-white skin, turned bluish under the surge of desire. She is moaning in the mating position of a pair of dogs, lying face down. And Shafiq, like a fierce dog, is pushing Nina from behind repeatedly. Their strange moaning sounds, screams, and shudders seem as if they will burst out of Mamun's head—and the other worshipers will hear them!

"O Allah! Protect me, forgive me, deliver me. What is my fault? What is my sin? What have I done wrong?" Mamun continued to mutter under his breath. He then looked up and opened his eyes, glancing around to ensure no other worshiper had overheard his soliloquy.

After the Imam’s sermon, the two Rakats[154] of the Eid prayer concluded. Yet, throughout the Qiyam[155], Ruku[155], Sujud[156], and Tashahhud[158], that same preoccupation continued to storm through his mind. During the Munajat (appeal), Mamun sobbed uncontrollably, seeking forgiveness with a broken heart from Allah, the Ultimate Healer; he hoped that amidst the collective repentance of the Imam and thousands of worshipers, his own sins would also be washed away.

According to Islamic doctrine, there are specific moments, situations, and postures in which asking the Almighty for something guarantees its fulfillment. Mamun holds firm to this theological belief. However, even as Eid passed, the agonizing mental distress of this sexual preoccupation—coupled with nearly a year and a half of severe mental illness—ravaged his body, mind, and very existence.

Determining specific spiritual conclusions can be impossible even for religious scholars, as Islamic theology links the outcomes of an action to various conditions, sub-conditions, and causalities. Such as, both the Quran and Hadith mention: Those who face the most misfortunes are often the most beloved to Allah. This is represented by the Prophet (PBUH): Allah accepts the prayers of the distressed. It is established that Allah responds to the prayer of the one in distress. Besides, it is also said: Suffering is often a test of faith and patience, intended to purify the heart or bring a person closer to their Creator. Moreover, this also narrated conversely, Islamic teachings also state that human suffering can be a punishment or a direct consequence of an individual's own crimes and sins.

Why, then, was Mamun’s Eid prayer not granted? Had he committed a major crime? An unforgivable sin? Yet, even after scouring his past, he could find nothing of the sort. Could he have unintentionally committed Shirk (associating partners with God)?
He recalled a casual phone conversation with his childhood friend Bappi before falling ill. In the flow of talk, he had said, "Hey friend! If Allah doesn't listen to good people like us, whose prayers will He accept?" Such words border on Shirk; even if they don't reach that level, they certainly smell of supreme arrogance. And Allah does not love the arrogant.

Is Mamun’s current mental catastrophe the result of some unknown, monumental sin like this? Why? Why? Why?

In this way, Mamun was utterly consumed by these contradictory and clashing thoughts. His feelings, tastes, desires, strength, and capabilities all withered away, leaving him a frail shadow of a man. In his diminished state, both body and mind felt weightless. It took immense effort just to move, as if he were drifting like a hollow balloon.
Yet, Mamun, firm in his religious faith, continued to endure each passing day and night, clinging to the hope of help and mercy from Allah, the Ultimate Healer. For Allah and His Messenger (PBUH) have said: True patience is at the first stroke of calamity, and patience is required most when it feels as though it can no longer be maintained.

Nursing this kind of imagined solace, Mamun somehow continued to drag himself through his precarious existence. Two and a half months slipped away, and **Eid-ul-**Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice Animals) arrived. Mamun thought to himself, "I will offer a sacrifice for the first time in my life." He consulted his wife, saying, "Look, it has become Wajib for me to offer a sacrifice. Should we try to do it this Eid, even if it's a struggle?"

His wife thought for a moment and replied in a somber tone, "Given your salary, if we spend on a sacrifice, how will we run the household for the rest of the month?"
Gathering his courage, Mamun said, "I'll do it as a shared sacrifice with the landlord. Wouldn't twenty thousand taka be enough?"

With a voice full of hesitation, his wife replied, "I suppose that would work."

During the prayers of Eid-ul-Adha, Mamun’s Supplication turned into an ultimatum of extreme demands. Fueled by suppressed rage and grief, he whispered in a strained voice: "O Allah! I can no longer endure this. For what sin, what crime, can I not rid my mind of those hideous images of sexual acts? If You do not heal me—I have no objection. You tested the Prophet Ayub (AS[159]) for years with leprosy, sores, and wounds that tore his body apart. But I am no Prophet. I am not built with their strength of body or mind. Just as You eventually commanded Prophet Ayub (AS) to bathe in the water of a specific spring, and upon emerging, he found his disease gone and his robust body restored—grant me such a miraculous healing of my mind. You are the Eternal Truth—of that, there is no doubt. But if You wish to prove Your existence to me today, then grant me death while I am in this prayer—or else, grant me my mental sanity!"

As the long supplication ended, Mamun felt his heart grow significantly lighter. His cheeks were drenched in tears, which he wiped across his entire face with both hands. It is stated in the Hadith: Allah will never cast into Hell a face that has been moistened by tears shed out of fear or love for Him.

Ah, what peace he felt! Had the Great Physician, the Almighty Allah, finally accepted Mamun’s simple plea—sanity, nothing but sanity? As Mamun exited the mosque, he recited the prophetic Supplication for leaving the masjid: "Allahumma inni as'aluka min fadlik!" [O Allah, I ask You of Your bounty/grace].

21

It was the day after Eid. The heat of June was blazing. The roads were empty. The sunlight was sickly, intensely yellow. Gusts of wind swept dust along the road. Mamun was heading to see Dr. Abdullah Al-

Mamun at his chamber in Green Road. He was a Professor, Psychiatrist, and Head of the Department at Dhaka Medical College[160]. He was cheerful, handsome, and looked like a small young man. Old age was setting in, but it was not easily visible. Mamun had known him for twenty years as a good psychiatrist of his paternal-nephew – the nephew had been suffering with OCD[161]. He was the country's one of the most famous and popular psychiatrists.

With a smiling face, he listened to the summary of Mamun's entire life story with meticulous detail, focus, and patience. He filled out a multiple-choice questionnaire to measure the severity of the mental illness. Then, he listed all of Mamun's current physical and mental symptoms on his prescription. He said confidently: "Dr. Nasim is one of my finest students. Her prescription was excellent! There is no need for change. Should we just keep that one?"

However, due to Mamun's insistence, he adjusted some of the dosages. To provide a Placebo Effect[162], he wrote a different brand name for the same medication! For example, Mitragin instead of Mirex. He also added Neotack—a gastric medicine.

Symptom	**Prescribed Medication**	**Date**
1. Low Mood 2. High Lack of Interest 3. Lack of mental Strength 4. Huge fatigue 5. Negative thoughts 6. Self-blame 7. Fear of Future 8. Hopelessness 9. Restlessness 10. Palpitation 11. Indecision 12. Psychomotor Slowness 13. Weightless Feeling	1. Esipram 2. Mitragin 3. Neotack 4. Indever 5. Aristovit-B/ Vitamin 6. Clonitril	10/Jun/2019

Within two months, the anxiety and fear of an uncertain future had significantly reduced. Despite the ongoing mental illness, he was still able to continue working. However, he had to be very careful with his conduct, conversations, and interactions so that his colleagues would not notice any abnormality. Since there was no major difference between Dr. Abdullah Al-Mamun's prescription and Dr. Nasim Jahan's last one, Mamun consulted Dr. Nasim Jahan again.

With hesitation and embarrassment, he informed her about changing his psychiatrist. She said calmly: "That's no big deal; and Dr. Abdullah Al-Mamun is my dear sir, after all!"

This time, Dr. Nasim Jahan changed one medicine, Mitragin, to Sentix. She dropped Indever, vitamins, and Neotack. She smiled slightly and said with a serious face: "Do not increase, decrease, or discontinue the medicine yourself!

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
On Rx for GAD Improving	1. Esipram 2. Sentix 3. Clonitril	17/Aug/2019
On Rx for GAD 1. Low Sleep 2. Bad Dream 3. Lack of Enjoyment	1. Esipram 2. Sentix 3. Indever	12/Sep/2019
GAD: Generalised Anxiety Disorder		

"Inside Mamun's skull, just above his brain, silkworms have made nests! They have even constructed the walls of their Cocoons[163]—all made of grey, dingy, old silk threads. That means the cocoons are very old. Mamun broke out in a sweat from fear and terror upon seeing this. Then, he went to the doctor himself. A very old, wizened doctor cut open his skull and removed the cocoons. Then he dissected the cocoons for examination. But there were no Silkworm Moths[164] inside the cocoons. The doctor was bewildered—where did they go? Did they perhaps fly away as butterflies? But the cocoons were intact—without any tears or rips. How could they have flown away?"

Every medicine has side effects. Psychiatric medicines create horrifying side effects in addition to physical reactions. That terrifying, bizarre dream was a part of it. Mamun woke up in the morning, startled! He felt his head to see if there was any cut or scratch on his skull. Not everything can be told to one's wife and children. They might think Mamun has gone mad. Then a family disaster could begin. Otherwise, as soon as he woke up, he would have asked his wife: "Why is there an scratch on my skull? Did you take me to the doctor?"

Two months later, he met with Dr. Nasim Jahan again. This time, she changed the anti-depressant tablet Esipram to the capsule Prodep. She replaced the sedative Clonatril with Olanap, an anti-anxiety and mood stabilizer. Due to the influence of these new medicines or the ongoing anxiety, his stomach remained constantly swollen. For this, the doctor prescribed Magnil.

This time's prescription was as follows:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
On Rx for GAD Improving: 1. Mild Improvement 2. Interference of Esipram 3. Low Sleep	1. Prodep 2. Olanap 3. Magnil 4. Advice: Counseling & Meditation	06/Nov/2019
GAD: Generalised Anxiety Disorder		

As this prescription recommended receiving "Counseling and Practicing Meditation," Mamun began reading about these subjects. However, the problem was the distance. Rajendrapur was about 60 km from Dhaka. There were no facilities for counseling or psychotherapy in Gazipur. And he did not have the time

or ability to go to Dhaka to pursue them. However, the Headmaster of the local high school regularly practiced meditation—the Quantum Method[165], The Science of Living, at Gazipur Chowrasta. Mamun read with great interest the book “Healthy Body, Peaceful Mind, Busy and Happy Life” written by the founder of the Quantum Method organization, Shaheed Al Bukhari. Reading the "Auto-Suggestion" chapter of this popular book Mamun was deeply affected and began practicing meditation. However, he customized the line for Auto-Suggestion[166] or Zikir—constantly reciting: "Alhamdulillah (All praise belongs to Allah), I am getting well. Alhamdulillah, I am getting well. Alhamdulillah, I am getting well!"

22

Salaried employees wake up on holiday mornings with joy and excitement. But after an unfulfilling sleep, Mamun's Friday began with lamentation and woe. What will he do with this day off? He opened his eyes and stared at the rotating fan on the ceiling, thinking that he used to teach his children on Fridays. Then he would watch English movies for a while. Now, he could do nothing. He could not concentrate on any

task. It was constant terror and anxiety. He worried about the future: What will he do? What will become of him? After eating his morning breakfast and taking his medicine, he would force himself to sit down to teach his son. But within fifteen or twenty minutes, he would feel drowsy. His wife would get angry and say: "You might as well lie down. Why are you drowsing like a hen laying eggs?"

The afternoon nap is precious to working professionals. It was the same for Mamun. But whenever the intensity of OCPD increased, all pleasant feelings turned into melancholy. After lunch, he would feel sleepy. He would want to take a nap. But as soon as he lay down, remorse and lamentations would run through his mind! Most friends, relatives, neighbors, and even people across the country were now enjoying a blissful nap after working hard all week. And Mamun felt depressed: Where is the end of this life? Will this rumination ever cease? The moment drowsiness set in, he would jolt awake in panic, thinking: "I shouldn't sleep. I must solve all my problems. Sleep is for those who are successful, who have no problems." Consequently, he would push himself off the bed. The whole flat felt so silent that it seemed like graveyard or outer space! Loneliness and loneliness all around - his heart is yearned with a deep sigh. He would look around the room—his wife was sleeping nearby, his daughter was sleeping in the next room, and his son was lying face down on the sofa, playing a mobile game. Seeing his father get up, leaving his sleep, the son asked in surprise: "What happened, Papa?" Mamun had no answer—he could only stare blankly at his son with eyes full of compassion!

His son was now seven years old. He played alone. All the neighborhood kids played, shouted, and ran around in the field in front of the house. Mamun would sit in a corner and watch them play. Other parents sat in corners of the field, scrolling on their mobiles. He also had his mobile. He hadn't logged onto Facebook even once in the last year! Whenever he logged in, he had a negative reaction.

His depression and hopelessness worsened. One day, after a long time, on a whim, he logged into Facebook and saw a picture: his friend Opu was standing on the beach with his teenage daughter. Seeing it on Facebook, Mamun's heart ached intensely! Alas, I haven't even taken a picture like that with my daughter! She is a teenager now too!

Winter is almost everyone's favorite season—and Mamun was no exception. But when afflicted by OCPD, all pleasant feelings turned into unpleasant ones. Lying wrapped in a quilt at night, he would think: Oh, if only this night would never end. And if only he didn't have to get out of bed in the morning with such great difficulty. Then there was the auto-rickshaw, the local bus, and the tiptoeing walk like a thief behind the workers on the muddy road, followed by entering the office with his head bowed!

Every year in December, after the children's exams, they would go to his in-laws' house. After arriving in Gaibandha this time, Mamun thought: How about consulting Dr. Akramul Haque Tarique, the Sir I saw in 2008? Perhaps his long experience and wisdom in psychiatry might bring a different effect to Mamun's treatment. Doctor's Pathology was a popular clinic in the district town. Dr. Tarique consulted here twice a month. His voice could be heard from a small glass chamber at the far end of the long, narrow, forty-foot-long hallway.

Occasionally, the sound of him scolding the frantic patients or their relatives could be heard. Mamun's serial number was thirty-nine. There were over a hundred patients. Waited and waited - morning turned into afternoon! His turn must be close. Thinking this, he rushed to the clinic manager and quickly went to offer the Jummah (Friday) prayers. Afternoon turned into evening! Mamun realized that the destructive

corruption culture had also crept into the clinic! Patients were buying serial numbers by paying a fifty or hundred Taka bribe. Mamun did not, and never would. But in a state of depression and weakness, one cannot protest. Nevertheless, Mamun habitually protested against the injustice. He told the manager: "Breaking the serial queue like this is not right!" The manager took his arm and said: "Most patients have come from far away. That's why we are letting them go early, you understand, brother, it's a cold night?"

Every hardship, every act of patience, has its reward. Mamun spent the entire day in the clinic observing the mentally ill patients of various ages and professions awaiting consultation. He was most astonished by a very religious young man, nearly forty years old, with a large beard. He was skinny, but had a robust appearance. His father lamented: Why did his healthy, strong, and attentive son become mad? Seeing this, Mamun's heart ached intensely—this old man probably didn't know that mere piety does not grant immunity from mental illness!

The call for Maghrib prayer began. The doctor asked everyone to take a half-hour break so he could pray. Mamun, impatient, walked into his chamber. He apologized and told the doctor about waiting all day and the irregularities. The doctor scolded the manager, saying: "This is absolutely not right!" Then, smiling, he asked Mamun to sit: "Alright! I will see you and then go for prayers."

Eleven years ago, Dr. Tarique did not have a beard. Now, he had a snow-white, hanging, bushy beard. All the hair on his head was also grey. Nothing of his youthful appearance remained—except the expression on his face! Mamun showed him the prescriptions written by him eleven years ago. He also showed him the prescriptions from Dr. Nasim Jahan and Dr. Abdullah Al-Mamun. Dr. Tarique asked: "What is the problem now?" Having seen patient after patient all day, his patience was largely exhausted. He was rushing to pray. Yet, he took the time to write down the current symptoms. Before writing the name of the medicine, he muttered repeatedly: "Dr. Nasim Jahan's medicine was excellent. Excellent! I see no need for change." Still, Mamun requested: "If you could suggest any better alternative medicine?"

He wrote this prescription:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
1. Depression	1. Serolux	10/Dec/2019
2. Panic	2. Quiet	
3. Weakness	3. Gingoba	
4. Low Sleep	4. Advice: Counseling & Meditation	
5. Obsession		

It is very difficult to tolerate the winter in North Bengal[167]. The feelings of winter and summer are intensified during mental illness. After taking the new medicine, Mamun woke up in the dead of night with severe chest pain. He woke up. His breathing was constrained. His stomach was bloated and hard. He felt intensely nauseous. Foul-smelling burps escaped his mouth. In the darkness, he noticed that his whole body was soaked in sweat. Mamun fearfully woke his wife by hand. Startled, his wife turned on the light and, while wiping the sweat from Mamun's face, cheeks, throat, and forehead, helplessly kept asking: "What happened? What happened to you?" Mamun, in a faint voice, kept saying: "I think I am going to die, I think I am going to die!"

After a while, he realized that he actually had indigestion. A little later, he had loose motions. This was all a side effect of the new medicines!

How long can a person sit continuously—hour after hour? Depression and hopelessness lead to neuro-muscular dysfunction. Movement of limbs and physical activity are drastically reduced. After eating breakfast at nine in the morning, he would wrap himself in a thick quilt and sit on the bed beside the outward window for hours, frozen in place. He thought slowly—he himself could not grasp what he was thinking.

He looked outside the window and saw the thick fog suspended like dense smoke. The smoke from the wood-burning stove all around mixed with it, making it even denser and heavier. The weak sun of the month of Poush (December-January) slanted through the gaps in the tree leaves and penetrated the smoke—just like Mamun's own leaning, burdened life!

Looking out the door at the courtyard—Mamun's brothers-in-law's wives, nephews, and nieces were moving around, cooking, and talking—everything seemed to be in slow motion. Sitting continuously for hours caused his legs and back to ache. He would constantly shift his sitting posture.

The call for the Zuhr prayer can be heard early in the winter - as the day time span shortened. Mamun was now so dull and depressed that hardly anyone came to talk to him. His second brother-in-law, coming to comb his hair at the dressing table, saw his brother-in-law sitting and said with a tone of rebuke: "Why are you sitting like this since morning? Can't you walk around a bit? You'll feel better, Brother!"

Whenever Mamun visited his home district, he would definitely go to his three sisters' houses. This time, he lacked the energy to do even that, although he wanted to. He pleaded with his wife to accompany him—because he was afraid and self-conscious about going out alone. What if some danger occurred on the street? His wife refused because the threshing of rice was going on in full swing all day.

A week later, he returned to Dhaka alone. He had to go to the office. But upon entering his house on a winter night, he was overwhelmed by fear and panic. The bright white light of the LED bulb seemed dim. The pink on one wall and the green on the other looked dark. The dark floor felt pitch black today. Mamun started puffed with fear. His breathing accelerated so much that it felt as if he had run a kilometer. In that state, he called his wife. His father-in-law answered, asking: "What happened, Son?" Mamun, gasping and stammering, only managed to say: "Please send Mini (his wife) immediately. It is impossible for me to stay at home alone." His father-in-law, surprised, told his daughter standing beside him: "Leave tomorrow. Your husband's condition is not good!"

The end of winter was near. A year had passed since Mamun's illness began. He had never suffered such a prolonged illness before. Even after consulting three doctors in a row, there were no signs of recovery! This led to the faith that no physician would be able to help him anymore. Not even all the psychiatrists in the world could cure him! The continuing sickness, helplessness, and unbearable mental and physical pain fostered suicidal ideation in Mamun! But if he committed suicide, what would happen to his children?

What happened? Thinking this, he continued to restrain himself.

The more inactive the human body becomes, the more active the brain becomes. Uncontrolled thought automatically searches for bizarre and erratic solutions to problems. Lately, Mamun noticed that a

terrifying, destructive urge had developed within him! This rumination was so active that it created a compulsive drive. In hyper-visualized, automatic scenes, Mamun saw himself: Going to the kitchen and hacking his wife to death with the vegetable cutter. His daughter ran in, hearing her mother's screams. He hacked her too, like a madman! Then his son ran in to save his mother and sister. Mamun hesitated, seeing his compassionate son's face, but then compulsively started the unfinished task! He struck his son's right cheek with the blood-soaked Stand Knife (vegetable cutter)! The cheek was cut open! The son screamed, calling his mother. In his eyes was horrific crying, fear, disappointment, and astonishment—could his father do this?

This hyper-visualized rumination could not be chased from his mind. It kept swirling in his head for days and weeks. Mamun became terrified, thinking: What if he suddenly, compulsively, commits this horrible, unjust act?

One day, after finishing the Isha prayer and concluding with Salam, he faintly requested his wife, with the expression of a criminal: "Hide all the knives, cutters, and Stand Knife in the house." She asked: "Why?" Mamun shamefully revealed everything. His wife, somewhat frightened, said: "You are the protector of the family; if you kill us, what else can be done!" Then, in a soothing tone, she reassured him that Mamun had not committed any bad deed that would cause Allah to allow him to commit such a terrible act!

When any illness is prolonged, the belief develops that one will never get well! The person believes that they, or some mistake, crime, or great sin of theirs, is responsible for this illness. But Mamun, despite much self-analysis, could not find anything of that sort. Yet, self-blame continued to devastate Mamun. Suicidal thoughts were lately peeking into his mind more strongly. But he could not proceed towards it for fear that the punishment for suicide is only Hell. Daily life had become a matter of endless sorrow amid the thought-crisis of life and death. One morning, before the Fajr prayer, instead of raising his hands for Appeal, he began continuously hitting his own cheeks with the sandal placed beside him! Hearing the sound of the sandal striking, his wife ran from the next room and stopped him.

23

On March 17, 2020, all schools and colleges across the country were declared closed indefinitely. People were dying in various parts of the country due to the Coronavirus infection. It had reached epidemic proportions across Europe. From March 24, all garment factories in the country were closed. Mamun went to the office only eight days in April: to disburse workers' salaries via mobile banking and to hang

"Factory Closed" notices repeatedly. The fear of death from Corona, combined with the ongoing fear of an uncertain future, created a strangely terrifying mental state. No matter how much a person wishes for death—when death is certainly approaching, they start fighting to live again!

As subtle as the Coronavirus was, Mamun's attempt to survive became equally subtle. Leaving the house, he would reach the office without touching the handle or seat of the auto-rickshaw, CNG, or bus. After opening a cigarette packet, he would forbid the shopkeeper from taking out a cigarette, instead taking it out himself. He kept a matchbox or lighter in his pocket so that he wouldn't have to touch a public lighter. And if he ever touched anything outside, he would ensure that hand did not touch any part of his body until he reached home or the office – and wash them with soap or hand sanitizer! But how many times is it possible to wash or sanitize one's hands? At the office, he had to sign hundreds of documents all day. Most of them came through the hands of workers and employees. So, he set only two specific times for signing papers—morning and afternoon. Still, if an urgent signature was required, he would sign it, avoiding touching the paper as much as possible. He always kept a small bottle of disinfectant in his breast pocket.

News of death started reaching Mamun's neighborhood! One morning, the mosque committee secretary, Liton Bhai [brother], spoke over the mosque's loudspeaker with a fearful, anxious, and warning voice: "No one should leave the house without an urgent reason. Someone in East Dighlapara[168] died last night from a Coronavirus infection." The mosque was right next to Mamun's three-story house. The iron horns of the loudspeakers vibrated loudly, like a school bell, right by his ears. Almost every day—sometimes at noon, sometimes in the afternoon, or sometimes at night—the announcement of death would drift into his ears! The area was under the Cantonment's jurisdiction. Several MPs[169] physically came to the mosque and imposed a restriction of no more than five people praying together. Besides, petrol police harassment was present at all times.

The atmosphere was tense all around. Lying down at night, he would see in a hyper-visualized thought: "Mamun has a fever! He barely got through the night. Waking up in the morning, his wife said with a surprised, terrified voice: 'Someone has locked us from the outside. She called the neighboring women through the window—but no one responded.' Mamun called the police. They reassured him: 'We are coming.' But hours passed. They never came! He called Ismail Bhai, a talkative friend in the neighborhood, and IT[170] Officer of RCPSC[171]. Ismail informed him: 'The door was locked on the order of the local leader.' He said, 'he would see what could be done.' Mamun realized with his Sixth Sense[172] which meant: The neighbors would not allow the fever-stricken person to come out from any house or to leave the neighborhood. 'Either survive on your own, or die. But you cannot come outside!' Even if he called relatives, they couldn't come from a distance—there was a nationwide lockdown!"

The fear almost became reality. After the April lockdown, only the washing unit opened that month. Only one hundred workers operated on the thirty-five thousand square foot floor. It was possible to maintain physical distance while working. Mamun started going to the office. The office car would pick him up from home—because there was almost no traffic on the roads. Plus, there were police restrictions on the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway[173].

About two weeks later, one night, Mamun actually felt feverish. When his wife lay down beside him, she touched Mamun's body. She cried out in a low voice! Mamun had a fever! He had to sleep in a separate room. That very night, all the plates, utensils, jugs, glasses, clothes, Lungis[174], and towels were separated.

His wife spent the entire night sitting near the door—terrified of what might happen; that panic was stamped on her face! In the morning, his nine-year-old son peeked through the door, greeted him cautiously, and asked: "What, Papa! Do you have Corona?"

And behind the son, the older daughter stood fearfully, tugging at her little brother's shirt—preventing him from running to their father. The symptoms continued, and Mamun's fever kept rising. He had no sore throat, and his sense of taste was fine. Difficulty in breathing had not yet begun. However, he had intense pain in his joints and a hidden pain throughout his body. It was impossible to lie down. He mostly remained seated. But how long can one stay seated? His wife, helpless and despairing, walked through the back of the neighborhood in the full midday sun to fetch medicine from the market—antibiotics, Paracetamol[175], and Vitamin-C tablets. The next day, the situation worsened. Wisely, he called the BGMEA PCR[168] Lab in Chandra[176]. The Director of the Lab, Dr. Hamid, reassured Mamun: "Even if you have Corona, there is nothing to worry about. A patient's condition is not critical until respiratory distress begins. If that happens, our ambulance will come and get you as soon as you call."

Hearing this, much of his fear subsided. After a week, the fever also broke. The fear of death is the greatest fear! Mamun, having survived the fear of death from Corona, regained some of his vitality. He continued going to the office regularly. The Coronavirus was so subtle and tiny that preventing its entry into the human body was impossible. Therefore, Mamun gathered his mental strength by trusting in Allah. The Messenger of Allah (PBUH[177]) said: "Contagious diseases exist, but they only spread by the command of Allah." Furthermore, he memorized the prayer for protection from unknown diseases and recited it constantly!

A mentally ill person wants to do many things but fails. Even when he remembers, hesitation, conflict, and crisis stop him. A year and a half had passed since Mamun's illness began. Countless moments, hours, days, and nights, he had felt like telling his dear friend Masud about his illness. Masud was knowledgeable, accomplished, and successful, working for an UN[178] Organization. He might know of a better psychiatrist. He could even afford to send Mamun abroad for treatment—money was no object for him. He hadn't spoken to his friend Arshad for a year and a half either. Arshad's help, cooperation, and advice were constant companions through all of life's crises. He just couldn't bring himself to call

One night, Masud himself called. He announced joyfully that he was donating rice, lentils, and oil to fifty poor families every day on his own initiative. Younger brothers from the neighborhood were helping him with this work. They were not afraid of Corona.

Mamun felt ashamed, thinking that they were fighting to conquer fear and save people; while Mamun was sitting at home, withered by pointless depression, hopelessness, and fear of the future. Thus, he never mentioned his own illness.

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Mamun's brother-in-law's daughter, Kotha, was preparing for the medical college entrance exam. She informed him that her coaching teacher, Dr. Shital[179], had also become mentally ill during his college days. He had assumed he would never become a doctor! But with psychiatric treatment, he is now healthy and practicing medicine regularly.

Kotha introduced Mamun to him over the phone. Dr. Shital listened to Mamun's long description of his illness with great patience, offered comfort, and advised him to see his senior physician, Dr. Parag[180]. He was especially well-known among the new generation of psychiatrists. Mamun was surprised to hear that Dr. Parag's senior physician was Dr. Abdullah Al-Mamun—the Head of the Department of Psychiatry at Dhaka Medical College; and Dr. Parag was the Registrar there! With great interest, he visited Dr. Parag's chamber at Prescription Point[181] in Banani.

After nearly two years of relentless mental illness, and having sought treatment advice from four top psychiatrists and one top psychologist, Mamun felt utterly helpless due to his lack of recovery. A new symptom had recently been added—Abnormal Perception[182]! For example, sometimes he felt like he wasn't alive. But if he wasn't alive, how was he perceiving things? Yes, one can perceive things even after death—in the afterlife! But how did the afterlife begin? The Day of Judgment[183] hasn't happened yet! Was Mamun going mad?

In the last six months, he had suffered Panic Attacks[184] at least five times. He had become dizzy, nearly fainting, in 47.1% of these attacks! Continuous mental illness for the last one and a half years, leading to fear. Fear was constant. This vicious cycle of rumination had overwhelmed Mamun.

About six months ago, on a holiday afternoon, Mamun was trying to sleep with a fearful mind. Suddenly, the office phone rang. His heart pounded violently. Surely the uncivilized, aggressive CEO had called! No, he picked up the phone and saw it was the ED (Marketing). He said politely: "Mr. Mamun! The CTPAT[185] audit score came in at only sixty-seven percent! We need at least eighty. We have to re-audit, understand?" The ED hung up right after.

Immediately, the Asr Azan (call to prayer) began with the loud voice of the Muazzin at a deafening volume. The Noise[186] of Azan stroke Mamun's heart, and it leaped in fright! Saliva filled his mouth. His lips dried up. His hands and feet tingled. He felt suffocated. His head was spinning. His vision went dark. He began to sweat all over. He felt the realization of death. He felt like he was fainting. He felt the moments preceding death beginning. His wife, lying beside him, became distressed seeing this rapid physical and mental change in Mamun in a moment. Mamun only managed to ask for “Water!” in a helpless whisper. One asks for water when dying. So, he began reciting: "La ilaha illallahu Muhammadur Rasulullah" (There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah). [As the speech of a good msulim!]

His wife poured water on his head. He could hear the sound of the water hitting the bucket. It was so distinct that it felt like his head was inside the bucket. He opened his eyes. The new white fan hanging from the ceiling was spinning rapidly. Above it, the pure white ceiling seemed vast. His daughter woke up in the next room from the sound of the water pouring and sat beside him. Mamun, with a lifeless hand like a patient nearing death, held his daughter's hand and said in a weak voice: "Ammu [mother]! Please forgive me. I couldn't be an ideal father. For the past one and a half years, I haven't spoken to you all with a smile. I haven't looked after you even for a while! I haven't showered you with affection. I am a failed father."

As soon as the Maghrib prayer call finished in the evening, his son ran into the room. He said in a doctor's tone: "Mother! Papa needs an oil massage. Give me mustard oil—I'll massage his feet." He then massaged the soles of his father's feet for about half an hour. Mamun felt much better!

24

Mamun's turn arrived. He entered the psychiatrist's room. Dr. Raisul Islam Parag, MBBS, MD[187] (Psychiatry). He was wearing a mask to prevent Corona Virus. Medium built. His eyes and forehead suggested he was handsome, calm, composed, and intelligent. He was sitting comfortably, leaning back in his chair. Seeing Mamun, he shifted slightly. In a melodious voice, he asked Mamun to sit comfortably. Mamun took out all the prescriptions in his life. Dr. Parag smiled softly and said: "I will look at those later! First, let me hear about your problems." Mamun began recounting everything, and the doctor wrote small notes with a navy-blue ballpoint pen on his colorful prescription pad. In about half an hour, he had filled the entire page! He used bullet points to list all the important events, accidents, sufferings and sorrows in Mamun's life; his past and present mental symptoms. Consequently, the entire prescription looked like a beautiful sketch made of vines and leaves!

Next, he meticulously read all of Mamun's previous prescriptions. He expressed some surprise, saying: "All the previous prescriptions were excellent! I am only keeping one medicine from the previous regimen—Prolert. And I am adding one new medicine—Lamicet. This medicine is a recent addition to psychiatric treatment by the WHO[188]. So, I am giving it on a trial basis. If it works well, I will increase the dosage."

Along with the medication, he wrote down advice to receive Counseling[189] and practice Meditation[190]. He would provide the counseling himself—but today, he only offered comfort by saying: Mamun is not a failure!

Instead, his goal of success is so high that he is repeatedly failing to reach it. He possesses a Perfectionist[191], resolute, and success-oriented mindset. His indomitable desire to reach a fixed goal repeatedly immerses him in devotion. But if he fails to reach the goal, he becomes disappointed. He is ambitious and creative, which is why he is not satisfied with any achievement. The position he holds today is one that hundreds of thousands of highly educated young people are striving to reach in Bangladesh. But even having reached it, he cannot find satisfaction. He did not receive much help or cooperation in life. Instead, he overcame countless adverse and hostile environments in life to today be the head of HRM[192] and Compliance[193] for two companies, i.e. Manager—earning nearly one lakh Taka! This is no small success. Even amidst the Corona crisis, he has booked four decimal of land near Savar Cantonment—yet many millionaires cannot acquire a single piece of land in Dhaka in their entire lives!

Dr. Parag continued to explain by citing his own example: he has not even been able to start his FCPS[194] yet. That is also his failure! But should he become depressed and disappointed because of that? Mamun needs to make new plans. For example, once the land is bought, he should buy a car—that would be a great consolation, comfort, and pride in Mamun's professional life! Furthermore, Mamun can start writing—because he has a history of success in that field! Then, once he has some savings, he can perhaps leave his job. There is much to be done in this world for educated, talented, hardworking, and struggling people!

Dr. Parag then wrote the prescription:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date

1. Low Mood 2. Hopelessness 3. Low Drive 4. Lonely Feeling 5. Abnormal Perception 6. Rumination about past 7. Guilty Feeling 8. Low Sleep 9. Low Sexual Desire 10. Obsession 11. Suicidal Thoughts/ Unwanted image of suicide	1. Prolert 2. Lamiset 3. Zoliam 4. Advice: Counseling & Meditation	05/08/2020

The words of Dr. Parag stuck in Mamun's mind! Indeed, he had achieved many things that he hadn't possessed before. His biggest success was that he no longer had financial hardship. He was now capable of fulfilling many desires and wishes in life—which had been impossible before. He followed Dr. Parag's advice attentively and continued taking the medicine eagerly. He began planning: What if he published the English grammar manuscript, which he wrote fifteen years ago in the upcoming book fair?

Fifteen days later, he set off in the morning from Rajendrapur with the intention of meeting Dr. Parag again. He was going to deposit earnest money for the land in Savar. The interview with the landlord was the following afternoon. Shaking along on a local bus through Chandana-Chandra in the scorching summer heat, the morning stretched into the afternoon. He got off the bus at Savar Palli Bidyut[195] Stand to catch a rickshaw. Just then, he saw two young Jahangirnagar University students walking by, talking and smiling. "Ah, Jahangirnagar! If only he could have studied there, perhaps he wouldn't have to be out on the road today with only ten thousand Taka in his pocket just to buy a small plot of land outside Dhaka Metropolitan City,"—a thought like this kept swirling in his mind[196].

Mamun's sincere colleague, Rauf Bhai's wife's friend, was Dr. Roxana[197]. Dr. Roxana's older sister was the popular counselor psychologist Mrs.Tania Hasan[198], Ph.D. (Psychology). She lived in Sydney, Australia, and visited the country occasionally. While in Bangladesh, she regularly saw clients at her chamber in Dhanmondi and provides counseling to people suffering from mental illnesses. Rauf Bhai informed Mamun that she was currently in the country. Unfortunately, now she was no longer sitting in her chamber due to the Coronavirus pandemic, but was continuing counseling online or over the phone.

Mamun scheduled an appointment with her over the phone. With a very compassionate and empathetic voice, she listened to Mamun's problems for hours and several consecutive days. She expressed great surprise and praised Mamun, saying: "Mamun, dear brother! I will address you informally. This is the first Client[199] I've had who can articulate their mental problems so accurately. That too, using psychiatric terminology. More importantly—you yourself have gone to the trouble of finding all the renowned psychiatrists in the country. You are receiving treatment and counseling from them! Many people spend their whole lives without realizing that such physical and mental problems are actually mental illnesses—which have very good treatments."

Then, she explained what a Trigger is. She explained when, why, and how a Panic Attack[200] occurs. She explained in detail the physical and mental strategies for escaping a panic attack.

She advised: "All thoughts, words, actions, people, places, times, environments, or situations that can create a trigger must be avoided." If a panic attack occurs, one can practice Breathing Exercises[201], pull on the earlobes, press hard on the joint knuckles of the fingers of one hand with the fingers of the other, drink water slowly, and engage in Zikir (remembrance of Allah).

This establishes contact between the affected person and their surrounding reality. As a result, the affected person regains consciousness and returns to a normal state.

Reaching his brother-in-law's house at noon, Mamun took a shower, walked a quarter kilometer of dirt road, absorbing the scorching sun, and returned after performing the Jummah[202] prayer. At noon, he ate rice heartily with beef curry, enjoying the taste. After this, going to sleep in the hot apartment with the east-facing window and curtained room, he started gasping for breath.

Then, suddenly he began the chest pain, difficulty breathing, blurred vision, dizziness, the bed shaking, and saliva filling his mouth—meaning the panic attack started again. The agony of death, the fear of death. His brother-in-law, his sister-in-law, and his niece and nephew frantically started pouring water over his head. After a while, he felt better. It felt like returning from the brink of death!

He managed to sleep a little in the afternoon. The Asr prayer was Missed[202]. He combined two prayers during Maghrib. His elder sister (wife of brother-in-law) suggested: "If possible, you and your brother-in-law should go in person and hand over the earnest money for the land." Mamun did so. After this, he felt a sense of achievement that night! Thus, he slept well in the entire night after a long time.

Panic attacks are such that their after-effects last for one or two days. Body tremors continue. The whole body shakes, but it is not noticeable externally. The tremor is only noticeable when he speaks, and his head shakes slightly visibly.

Mamun, in that state, set off the next day in the stuffy heat for Prescription Point. Dr. Parag listened to the story of the panic attack and smiled softly. He explained: "In a panic attack, there comes a fear of death, but death does not occur! Because at some point, the brain realizes the panic is fake!" For this condition, he added Nortrin and Zoliam and wrote the prescription:

Symptom	Prescribed Medication	Date
1. Improving 2. Panic Attack yesterday 3. Will be better if the memories could be deleted	1. Prolert 2. Lamiset 3. Nortrin 4. Zoliam 5. Counseled	20/Apr/2020

A few days after starting this prescription, Mamun's childhood friend Rashed called him suddenly one night after three decades! Upon hearing about Mamun's mental distress, he gave him a nutritional drink "ARGI (L-Arginine + Vitamin Complex)", manufactured by Forever Living Products, USA. Nobel Prize-winning physician Dr. Ferid Murad himself has praised the miraculous effectiveness of the product's components, Arginine[203] and Nitric Oxide[203]. He has presented his research papers in internationally renowned journals. And many medical, nutritional, and health scientists have referred to Arginine as the Miracle Molecule[204]!

Mamun sent a message via WhatsApp to Dr. Parag, asking for his opinion on whether the ARGI+ nutritional drink would react with his ongoing medication. Dr. Parag replied that if he felt good after drinking it, he could continue. Mamun started drinking it—one tonic pack every morning, mixed with a glass of plain water on a full stomach. The taste was unprecedented—like the soft drink Coca-Cola; but with fruit juice, the aroma of countless flowers, and a bluish color, it energized the body and mind, creating a stimulating force. Shortly after drinking it, a noticeable change occurred in his body and mind. He felt so refreshed that he started sweating, and continuous hiccups of satisfaction emerged!

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Mamun felt a great interest in the Forever Living Products company. He learned from Rashed that it was possible to earn a lot of money by becoming a Supervisor for the company and selling their consumer

products alongside his job. Rashed himself was doing this alongside his job. Most of their products were based on the wondrous nutritional plant Aloe Vera[205] and were internationally renowned.

Mamun was simultaneously happy and energized by reuniting with his childhood friend, which was augmented by an invitation to hang out near the Forever office in Uttara! They started hanging out all day every Friday next to the Forever Living Products Sales Center in Uttara. Mamun felt as if, after almost two years, he had emerged from hiding and was enjoying the bright light of the world. Morning, noon, afternoon—on the main road of BNS Center[206], in front of the Rupantar Coaching Center[207]. This coaching center belonged to Rashed's co-supervisor friends of Forever. Excellent Bengali food was provided here in their small canteen at noon. They wouldn't even let him pay the bill!

The clean, bright sun of autumn beat upon Mamun's eye sockets for hours on end. Internally, it rapidly stimulated the release of Dopamine[208]. His body and mind makes him lively and alert. Within a few days, he also became an Assistant Supervisor! He sought out old friends and relatives to market and sell the Forever products. During office breaks, especially every evening, he spent nearly an hour communicating with them. His old office, his old job—it no longer felt monotonous, tiring, or depressing. He worked every day and night with unprecedented full vigor!

He began the process of publishing his English grammar book through his knowledge-seeking elder brother and friend, Shakil Morshed. Mamun's first book was released at the Ekushey Book Fair[209]. Due to the delayed book fair during the Corona period, the number of visitors and buyers was very low. Still, the dream of becoming an author was successful! He spent seventy thousand Taka to publish one thousand copies of the book. But he did not feel the slightest regret about it. Great sacrifice is necessary to achieve something great. Mamun took oath: “This was only the beginning of his writing arena!”

At the next Ekushey Book Fair, Mamun published a translated article on mental health in a literary compilation. His sincere colleagues from the office attended the compilation's launch ceremony!

Mamun's sincere and trusted senior colleague was Rasel Sheikh, a textile engineer. He had been working as a GM at the company for ten years. Due to the sincere efforts of both men, the factory grew from one thousand workers to three thousand workers over the last two years.

Mamun met Dr. Parag again after nearly two years since their last consultation. It was a courtesy visit. Mamun's physical and mental health had been going very well. He had spontaneously halved his medication dosage over the last six months, because his enthusiasm and excitement had increased so much that he realized from his own experience that the dosage needed to be reduced. However, he was mentally afraid: that increasing or decreasing the dosage without the psychiatrist's advice could have adverse effects.

Dr. Parag smiled gently and said: "No problem at all. The human body is the greatest physician!" Mamun, happy and with a mix of shyness and humility, mentioned his writing endeavors—which Dr. Parag had advised during their previous meeting. Dr. Parag said happily: Yes, he had received Mamun's English grammar book via courier and had given it to his child to read.

Mamun now shed his shyness and apologized. He said: "Although I lack the qualification, I have translated an international English article on mental health." The doctor looked at him in surprise! Mamun handed him the copy of the literary compilation. After glancing at the book cover, the inner pages, and the

first page of the article, he exclaimed enthusiastically: "This is the first time in my life, I have seen a patient who can also be an author. And on the subject of mental health, no less!"

Mamun informed him that his prescription advice was mentioned at the end of the article. Even more surprised, Dr. Parag asked Mamun to read that section aloud. Mamun read it and said in a hesitant tone: "I did not mention your name without permission, but your designation and workplace are identified." Tears welled up in the doctor's eyes. He said in a deep voice: "From now on, I give you permission to publish my name in all the books you write. And I also give you permission to publish the name of Dr. Abdullah Al-Mamun Sir. I will inform Sir about this when I have time. And I will gratefully remember this article in all the seminars and symposiums I have the opportunity to attend in my life!"

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The following year brought even more success! Mamun's second translated article on mental health was published in a second literary compilation. This time, many of Mamun's colleagues, friends, and relatives

attended the book fair. His heart swelled with joy and pride. He also sent this book to Dr. Parag via courier service. Dr. Parag congratulated Mamun on WhatsApp!

He had sent the English grammar book to Dr. Nasim Jahan. She had responded on WhatsApp:
"Thanks a lot! Got your book yesterday. Keep going. Best of luck always.

- *Dr. Nasim Jahan, BIRDEM"*

This time, Mamun sent both mental health articles together to Dr. Nasim Jahan via courier. But due to her busy schedule, or some other reason, she could not give any reply. Mamun mentally hoped: he would definitely meet Madam one day and hand the books to her. She would surely be very happy then.

Success is never continuous. Failure returns repeatedly. Fourteen years into his career, the CEO suddenly summoned Mamun to the Head Office. Mamun had an inkling beforehand. Top management authorities are never permanently satisfied with the success of subordinate managers. They always want more, and more. On his way to the Head Office, Mamun gave an interview at the Head Office of his former group of industries. They had proactively called Mamun back after almost five years. This was a matter of great pride!

After successfully completing the interview, he met the CEO of his current office with a strong resolve. The CEO kept Mamun waiting under various excuses until evening. After the Maghrib prayer, he called Mamun into his room and told him without any pretense: Look, Mamun! The top management no longer wished to continue with your employment. What do you say?” Mamun was mentally prepared. He asked expressionlessly: "What is the reason?" The CEO stammered, his face turning red, and said: he would discuss it frankly somewhere outside this office another day. But for now, he was unable to say anything. However, he acknowledged Mamun's work efficiency and his contribution to the company on his behalf. He had no personal objection. Mamun expressed his wish to submit a resignation letter. The CEO apologized with gratitude and humility, talking indirectly for nearly half an hour. He asked for prayers for his back pain. But Mamun was left with one painful realization—throughout the long discussion, the CEO never asked Mamun to sit down. He finished the entire discussion with Mamun standing.

Mamun pledged: he would take revenge for this disrespect with some upcoming major success. He did not break down at all. In the three months following his dismissal, he took interviews with a determined spirit for AGM or DGM positions at five group of industries. All of them went very well. He was sure: one of them, a job will certainly be secured, Insha'Allah (God willing). Because Allah alone is the Provider of Sustenance. Mamun had learned how to overcome life's adversities. Self-restraint, patience, and perseverance—all failures can be converted into successes; in a different form, in a different way. And that is exactly what happened.

Alhamdulillah (Praise be to Allah), one afternoon, a phone call came from one of the top ten garment manufacturing companies in the country. Mamun had secured the job! As the Head of HR, Admin & Compliance in a factory of six thousand workers. The call to prayer was sounding—the Jummah (Friday) Azan. Mamun immediately prostrated (Sizdah) on the bare floor! He expressed his utmost gratitude to Allah. He is the owner of all blessings.

28

Mamun continued his job with great efficiency, and simultaneously, he regularly dedicated one hour every morning to writing. An extended version of his first article on mental health received an

opportunity to be published as a psychiatric novel in Bengali by a leading publishing house in the country! Entirely at their expense. They would also give him a good honorarium.

Yet, Mamun still experienced sudden jolts during work breaks, in his leisure time, when going to sleep at night, or upon waking up in the morning, thinking: “What if I ever become ill again? Mental illness! What if, a terribly dreadful life starts again? Will this time lead to a severe disaster that I will no longer have the power to control?”

Mamun still has to take two medicines twice a day—Prodep and Lamitrine. Dr. Parag said: perhaps he will have to take this medicine for life. This is because Mamun's psycho-physical structure is such that the possibility of deterioration cannot be ruled out. Mamun has occasionally stopped taking the medicine for two or three days—experimentally. When he stops the medicine, unnecessary melancholy tries to engulf him, his body trembles, and he feels restless!

Now, at this age of fifty, he thinks every day: there are only ten more years left. Then he will become old, and then die. The average lifespan of a human is sixty—the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) stated this in his Hadith! Just ten more years will pass somehow or another. The goal is simply to be active, healthy, and content in every moment, every hour, every day; to be well with what he has. And to be grateful to Almighty Allah, who Himself said in the Holy Qur'an: "I will remove all the sadness of the believer in the Hereafter!"

Date of Composition: July 15 - December 07, 2023

FOOT NOTES

1. Gaibandha: A Northern district of Bangladesh.

2. Panjabi: Is a popular traditional upper garment for men and boys, particularly in Bangladesh and parts of India**.**
3. Or pyjama originates from the Hindi word pājāma, which itself comes from the Persian *pāy* (leg) and *jāma* (garment). This word was adopted into English during British rule in India.
4. Jashod: One of the popular leftist political party in the 80's.
5. Rangpur: A Northern Division of Bangladesh.
6. Dhaka: The capital city of Bangladesh, and the second largest mega-city in the world, situated in the middle of the country.
7. Pucca: In India and Bangladesh, Pucca (or *Pakka*) refers to "solid" or "permanent" structures.
8. Katha: Katha (or *Kattha*) is a traditional unit of area used for land transactions in Bangladesh, India (Assam, Bihar, West Bengal), and Nepal. It is officially obsolete in favor of the metric system, but remains widely used in real estate and agricultural discussions. Bangladesh & West Bengal: 1 Katha is standardized at 720 square feet.
9. Mirpur: Nortern city of Dhaka Metropolitan
10. Kalshi: South Avenue to Northern Section of Mirpur (Section-12)
11. BTV: Bangladesh Television
12. VCD: Video Record Player – the analogue electro-mechanical device in 80s.
13. Taka: The smallest Paper Note/ Coin of Bangladesh.
14. Kolkata: Capital of the one province of India – situated beside the West boarder of Bangladesh.
15. Division: The biggest administrative unit of Bangladesh – there total eight divisions.
16. Savar: An Upazila (subdistrict) of Dhaka District.
17. One hundred taka: Is now equal to 0.61 great British Pound.
18. Khichuri: also known as *khichdi* or *khichri* - is a classic South Asian one-pot comfort dish made primarily from rice and lentils.
19. Zohor: Zuhr (or *Dhuhr*) is the second of the five daily obligatory prayers in Islam. It is performed in the middle of the day, acting as a spiritual break during busy daily activities.
20. BMA Long Course: Bnagladesh Millitary Academy Long Coures of two years -by enrolling and passing this course the Cadets posted in military service as a Lieutenant.
21. Star Marks: The highest exam result (75% of total subjects' marks) in Secondary and Higher Secondary education level in Bangladesh in old academic system. Now is GPA – Grade Point Average.
22. Songshoptok: In Bengali, it literally means an "indomitable soldier" or a warrior who **is** "sworn not to retreat" from the battlefield.
23. Government Bangla College: One of the seven government college of Dhaka Metropolitan City – situated in Mirpur.
24. RUET: Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology
25. BUET: Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology
26. ISSB: Inter Services Selection Board
27. IQ: Intelligence Quotient, refers to a score derived from standardized tests designed to assess human intelligence.
28. New Market: One of the famous and popular shopping market in Dhaka Metropolitan.
29. Poisa: In Bangladesh, Poisha is the fractional monetary unit of the Taka **(**৳ or Tk), the national currency.

30. Tempo: In the context of Bangladesh, a Tempo is a small, motorized three- or four-wheeled public transport vehicle.
31. Kochukhet: Is primarily known as a bustling neighborhood and commercial hub located at the edge of the Dhaka Cantonment.
32. IEB: The Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh
33. Lungi: Refers to a traditional garment widely worn by men in Bangladesh, as well as parts of South and Southeast Asia.
34. Palash Para: A locality behind the West College Road in Gaibandha Municipality.
35. Kamar Para: A remote village to the North of Gaibandha town.
36. DC Office: Office of the Deputy Commissioner.
37. Chapadaha: A nearby village to the North of Gaibandha town.
38. Decimal: In the land records of Bangladesh and India, a Decimal is a standard unit of area. One Decimal is equal to 435.6 square feet**.**
39. Bhelakopa: A nearby village to the South of Gaibandha town.
40. Jahsim (1950–1998): Was a legendary Bangladeshi film actor, producer, and fight director, widely regarded as the "Action King" of Dhallywood.
41. Delayed Sleep Cycle: In a medical context, it is also known as Delayed Sleep Phase Disorder (DSPD). This condition occurs when an individual's internal body clock (circadian rhythm) is shifted significantly later than the conventional societal sleep time.
42. Char: The riverine land, refers to a tract of land surrounded by water, typically formed through the accumulation of river sediment or silt.
43. Pallabi: One of posh locality to the West of Mirpur Section-12.
44. Eidgah: Is an open-air enclosure or ground used in Islamic culture, particularly in South Asia, for the large communal prayers offered on the mornings of the two annual Eid festivals: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.
45. Shaheed Zia: refers to Ziaur Rahman (1936–1981), the former President of Bangladesh and a central figure in the country's liberation and political history. The honorary title "**Shaheed**" (meaning "Martyr") was bestowed upon him following his assassination in 1981. He founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on September 1, 1978, which remains one of the major political parties in Bangladesh. As a Major in the East Bengal Regiment, he broadcast the declaration of independence on March 27, 1971, from Kalurghat Radio Station in Chittagong. During the 1971 War of Independence, he served as a Sector Commander (Sector 1 and later Sector 11) and led the "Z Force" brigade. He was awarded the Bir Uttom**,** the second-highest military gallantry award in Bangladesh. He served as the 7th President (some sources list as 6th) of Bangladesh from 1977 until his death in 1981. He is credited with introducing multi-party democracy, "Bangladeshi Nationalism," and a 19-point development program that included major rural initiatives like the Canal Excavation Program**.**
46. High School: In Bangladesh, high school refers to the secondary level of the national education system, typically covering grades 6 through 10.
47. BRTC: Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation
48. BSCIC: Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation
49. Madhukari: The term literally refers to the "lifestyle of a honeybee" (*Madhu* meaning honey) and has significant spiritual connotations. But this Madhukari is a highly acclaimed and landmark novel by the renowned Indian Bengali author Buddhadeb Guha, first published in 1987.

50. Raju's Hotel: A famous Bangla food restaurant was from 1970's to 2020's named after a popular local young leader of Block-D, Section-12, Mirpur.
51. Adda: is a quintessentially Bengali term for an informal, long, and free-flowing conversation or gathering, typically among friends or colleagues. It is more than just "small talk" or "hanging out"; it is a cherished cultural practice and a way of life in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India.
52. Singara: In Bangladesh, the Singara (or Shingara) is arguably the most popular savory snack, prized for its crispy, flaky pastry and spiced vegetable or meat fillings. Unlike its larger Punjabi counterpart (the samosa), the Bangladeshi singara is typically smaller, rounder, and features a thinner, crunchier crust that often develops tiny air bubbles when deep-fried.
53. Purri: In Bangladesh, it is a popular deep-fried, unleavened bread made from wheat flour (typically *maida* or *ata*). It is a staple snack and breakfast item, prized for its golden, puffed-up texture and savory fillings.
54. Zainal Bhai: Mr. Zainal is the owner of a street tea stall under a big Banyan Tree beside the Raju's Hoted. And, in the context of Bengali culture and daily life in Bangladesh, *Bhai* literally means "brother," but its usage extends far beyond biological relationships into a vital social lubricant.
55. Milk Vita is the leading state-owned dairy brand in Bangladesh, operated by the Bangladesh Milk Producers' Co-operative Union Limited (BMPCUL)**.** Established in 1974, it was modeled after India's Amul to support rural farmers and provide safe dairy products to urban areas.
56. In the context of psychology and behavioral health, Obsessive Preoccupation refers to a state where an individual's thoughts are dominated by a single idea, person, activity, or worry to the point that it interferes with daily functioning and mental well-being.
57. DAP: Detailed Area Plan for urban planning in Dhaka, is a strategic blueprint prepared to manage the rapid and often unplanned urbanization of Dhaka and its surrounding areas
58. Jyestha: The second Bengali Calendar Month.
59. In the context of the Bangladesh education system, BA stands for Bachelor of Arts, an undergraduate academic degree awarded by universities and colleges to students who complete a program in the liberal arts, humanities, or social sciences. As of early 2026, the structure of B.A. programs in Bangladesh depends on the type of institution: (i) BA (Honours): A four-year specialized degree offered by public and private universities. It focuses deeply on a single major subject (e.g., English, History, Economics). (ii) BA (Pass) Course: A three-year general degree primarily offered by colleges affiliated with the National University (NU). It covers a broader range of three or four elective subjects.
60. Hindi Quote: Hindi quotes continue to be widely shared across Bangladesh and South Asia for inspiration.
61. NHTTI: National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute. It is the premier state-run vocational training center in Bangladesh dedicated to developing skilled professionals for the hospitality and tourism industry.
62. Hotel Avokash: Is a 3 to 4-star hotel in Dhaka that is an operating unit of the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), the government's tourism agency. It is located in the commercial area of Mohakhali.
63. Gulshan-Banani: The most prestigious and affluent neighborhoods in Dhaka, serving as the city's primary diplomatic, commercial, and high-end residential hubs.

64. Thola: Slang for Police (Thulla/Thola) **-** in regional slang (predominantly in North India and sometimes used in Bangladesh), the term Thola or Thulla is a derogatory or informal way to refer to a police officer.
65. Rajshahi: Located on the banks of the Padma River in northwestern Bangladesh, Rajshahi is a major divisional city celebrated as the "Silk City" and the "Education City." It is consistently recognized as one of the cleanest and greenest cities in South Asia.
66. Ishwardi: Is an upazila of the Pabna District and serves as one of the most vital industrial and communication hubs in northwestern Bangladesh. It is strategically located near the Hardinge Bridge (builder was the Lord Hardinge in then British India) and the Lalon Shah Bridge over the Padma River.
67. In the context of Bangladesh, BIT historically refers to the Bangladesh Institute of Technology, the former name of the country's premier regional engineering universities.
68. IDCOL: Infrastructure Development Company Limited, a government-owned specialized non-bank financial institution (NBFI) in Bangladesh. Established in 1997, it is the primary agency responsible for financing private sector infrastructure, renewable energy, and energy efficiency projects.
69. IDB: Refers to the IsDB (Islamic Development Bank) or the famous IDB Bhaban (high-rise building) computer market in Dhaka.
70. In Bangladesh, CIP stands for Commercially Important Person, a national-level honorary status awarded by the government to individuals for their significant contributions to the national economy through exports, trade, or remittance inflows.
71. BTV: Bangladesh Television, the state-owned national television network of Bangladesh. It is the country's oldest television network, having started operations on December 25, 1964, and rebranded after the nation's independence in 1971.
72. CFDS/ FADS: Central Fire Detection System, also stands for Fire Alarm and Detection System.
73. AC: Air Conditioning
74. Toufique-e-Elahi Chowdhury: Is a prominent Bangladeshi political figure, former high-ranking bureaucrat, and a decorated freedom fighter. As of early 2026, his status is defined by his long tenure as a powerful advisor and his subsequent legal challenges following the 2024 political transition.
75. Bir Bikrom: Is the third-highest gallantry award in Bangladesh. It is bestowed upon members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and freedom fighters who displayed exceptional courage and acts of bravery during the 1971 Liberation War.
76. PM: Prime Minister
77. Biri: Bengali word of Cigarette.
78. Inferiority Complex: Refers to an intense, persistent feeling of inadequacy or insecurity, often resulting from a belief that one is deficient or "less than" others in some way
79. Dhaka College: Is the oldest and one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Bangladesh. Established in 1841, it has played a foundational role in the development of modern education in the Indian subcontinent.
80. Tarun: Meaning of this Bengali word is "Youth". He belonged to a posh family. But due to his father's harsh and autocratic parenting in his early childhood, he derailed from his normal life, stopped his education just after SSC level, plunged into addicted life, eventually went mad in his later youth life around age of 30, and rehabilitated in normal life at last. Later, he was got married

with a Japanese graduate woman by the help of his own eldest brother’s wife – a Japanese aristocratic and graduated from Tokyo University. After being married, he went to Tokyo for permanent living, learnt Japanese language, got normal job, and spent about ten years as bachelor in a normal mess! Because, he revealed that his so-called wife wants to convert him into Japanese Pegan Religion. As he was highly Islamic Minded personality, he denied to do so. Eventually, he got frustrated again with his single and lonely life; and again dived into fatal addiction, specially with wine, and died of heart attack at the age of around 41 years in his melancholic Japanese male-mess!

81. BCS: Is the most prestigious government service in Bangladesh, with recruitment conducted by the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC).
82. Anti-Depressants: Are psychiatric medications used primarily to treat clinical depression, anxiety disorders, and chronic pain. In Bangladesh, their use is strictly regulated and requires a prescription from a registered psychiatrist.
83. Forty Nights: The number forty holds significant symbolic and spiritual importance in Islam, often representing a period of completion, testing, or spiritual transformation, rather than a single event.
84. BASIC Bank: Is a 100% state-owned commercial bank in Bangladesh, incorporated as Bangladesh Small Industries and Commerce Bank PLC. It blends development and commercial banking objectives, with a primary mandate to finance small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
85. Degree: In the Bangladesh education system, "Degree" specifically refers to a Bachelor’s (Pass) Course, which is a general undergraduate program distinct from a Bachelor’s (Honours) course.
86. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891) was a legendary Bengali polymath, educator, and social reformer. His title "Vidyasagar" (meaning "Ocean of Knowledge") was awarded to him by Sanskrit College, Calcutta, for his vast erudition in Sanskrit and philosophy.
87. VCR: Is an acronym that stands for Video Cassette Recorder**,** an electronic device that was revolutionary in home entertainment during the late 20th century. This technology has largely been replaced by modern digital formats.
88. Victorian Age: In the history of the United Kingdom and the British Empire (including colonial Bengal/Bangladesh), the Victorian Age refers to the period of Queen Victoria's reign from 1837 to 1901.
89. Nilphamari: A northern district of Bangladesh, adjacent to Indian Border.
90. Tahajjud Prayer: Is a voluntary, highly meritorious "Night Prayer" in Islam. It is performed after the Isha (night) prayer and preferably after waking up from sleep in the latter part of the night, before the break of Fajr (dawn).
91. SP: Superintendent of Police
92. Khaki: Refers to both a globally recognized color and a specific fabric that holds deep historical and institutional significance in Bangladesh and South Asia.
93. Allahu Akbar: Is an Islamic phrase known as the Takbir, which translates to "Allah (God) is the Greatest." It is the most frequently used phrase in Islamic life, serving as a declaration of faith, a call to prayer, and an expression of gratitude.
94. Deen: Continues to be a fundamental concept in Bangladesh, referring to a complete way of life or a divinely ordained system of belief and conduct, rather than just "religion" in a narrow sense.

95. Tablighi: Refers to the followers of Tablighi Jamaat, a global, apolitical Islamic missionary movement focused on reviving personal faith and spiritual development within the Muslim community.
96. Oxytocin: Is recognized both as an essential medical drug and a critical biological hormone often dubbed the "love hormone" or "cuddle chemical" due to its role in social bonding and emotional regulation.
97. Ansar: In Arabic, it literally means "helpers," "supporters," or "volunteers". But here Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party (Ansar & VDP) remains the largest paramilitary and community-based volunteer force in Bangladesh. Often referred to as the "grassroots guardians," their primary mission is to maintain internal security, assist the police, and provide rural socioeconomic development.
98. Monipur High School and College: Is one of the most prominent and highly populated educational institutions in Dhaka, Bangladesh, consistently ranking at the top for its academic results.
99. Hafezia Madrasa: Is a specialized Islamic educational institution primarily dedicated to the memorization of the Holy Quran (Hifz). Students who successfully memorize the entire Quran are awarded the title of "Hafez."

100. Mohammadpur: One of posh locality in Dhaka Metropolitan.

101. Dhuhr: (or Zuhr) Is the second of the five daily mandatory Islamic prayers (Salah). It is performed midday, specifically between the time the sun passes its zenith (noon) and the beginning of the Asr prayer.

102. Asr: Is the third of the five mandatory daily Islamic prayers (Salah). In 2026, it remains a critical spiritual bridge between the midday and sunset periods.

103. Maghrib: Is the fourth of the five mandatory daily Islamic prayers (Salah), performed just after sunset.

104. Ramadan: Is the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic lunar calendar, dedicated to fasting, prayer, reflection, and community.

105. Or Pakeezah, is a word of Persian and Urdu origin meaning "pure," "clean," or "chaste". A leading textile conglomerate established in 1982, specializing in fabrics, sharees, and garments.

106. Narshingdi: A district of Bangladesh to the South-East of Dhaka District, is a prominent industrial and commercial district.

107. UNICEF: (the United Nations Children's Fund) Is the world's leading organization dedicated to protecting children's rights and well-being in over 190 countries and territories

108. Brahmanbaria: A district of Bangladesh to the North-East of Dhaka District, and beside of Indian Boarder, often referred to as the "Cultural Capital of Bangladesh" due to its rich heritage in music, literature, and the arts.

109. Panchagarh: Is the Northernmost district of Bangladesh, located in the Rangpur Division and bordering India on three sides. Known for its unique geography, including being in the lower basin of the Himalayas, it has emerged as a significant hub for tea production and tourism.110. Pajero: The Mitsubishi Pajero is a legendary off-road vehicle.

111. Lakh: A lakh (abbreviated L) is a unit in the South Asian numbering system representing one hundred thousand (100,000), used extensively in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other neighboring countries.

112. Bogura: (also known as Bogra) Is a major city and district in northern Bangladesh, widely recognized as the **"**Gateway to North Bengal."

113. Rangpur: Rangpur is the administrative headquarters of the Rangpur Division and a major city in northern Bangladesh.

114. Dinajpur: Dinajpur is a historic and agriculturally rich district in northern Bangladesh, under the Rangpur Division. It is famously known as the "Granary of Bangladesh" and the "City of Lychees."

115. Thakurgaon is a scenic district in the northwestern corner of Bangladesh, located within the Rangpur Division. Bordered by India on three sides, it is known for its tranquil environment, lush green landscapes, and ancient heritage.

116. Circuit House: In South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh and India, is a government-owned guest house primarily used for the temporary accommodation of visiting high-ranking officials.

117. Sangskrit: Sanskrit (locally referred to in Bangladesh and West Bengal as Sangskrit or Shongskrito is an ancient Indo-Aryan language that serves as the liturgical and philosophical foundation for Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

118. A Bigha is a traditional unit of measurement for land area, widely used across South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. Because it is a traditional unit, its exact size varies significantly by region**.** 1 Bigha = 14,400 Square Feet.

119. Kazi Farms Group is one of the largest and most prominent agro-industrial conglomerates in Bangladesh.

120. Wakf Estate: In Islamic law and the legal systems of South Asia (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan), is a permanent dedication of movable or immovable property for religious, pious, or charitable purposes recognized by Islam.

121. Union Parishad (UP) is the smallest rural administrative and local government unit in Bangladesh.

122. Amin Bazar: Amin Bazar is a strategically significant commercial hub and the primary western gateway to Dhaka city, located in the Savar Upazila.

123: Al-Hamra: Arabic for "The Red One" is a prestigious name used globally for historical landmarks, commercial centers, and residential developments. But, in the novel, this Al-Hamra is a name of one of the best private highway bus service in North Bengal!

124. In the administrative system of Bangladesh, a Sadar Upazila refers to the central or headquarter sub-district of a particular district. The term "Sadar" is derived from Persian, meaning "chief" or "center."

125. Islambagh: A small locality, located to the North of Panchagarh Municipality.

126. Prodhan: Is a prominent surname in Bangladesh, which means “Chief”.

127. Sufiism: (Known as Tasawwuf in Arabic) is the inward, mystical dimension of Islam. It focuses on the spiritual journey of the soul to achieve direct personal experience and proximity to God through love, devotion, and self-purification.

128. Disprin is a widely recognized brand name for medication containing Aspirin (Acetylsalicylic Acid) as its active ingredient. It belongs to a class of medicines known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and works as a fast-acting analgesic (pain reliever), antipyretic (fever reducer), and anti-inflammatory agent.

129. Nimo: Generic name Nimesulide is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) with pain-relieving (analgesic) and fever-reducing (antipyretic) properties. In 2026, it remains a controversial medication due to its association with severe liver toxicity.

130. NTRCA: NTRCA Examination (Non-Government Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority).

131. Shalwar-Kameez: Also spelled Salwar-Kameez, is a traditional outfit worn by both women and men in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. It is valued for its comfort, modesty, and cultural elegance.

132. Gazipur: one of the most critical industrial and historical districts in central Bangladesh, serving as a primary northern gateway to the capital, Dhaka.

133. Bhawal National Park: one of Bangladesh's most important nature reserves and recreational destinations. Originally part of the Madhupur Tract, it was established to protect the region's unique Sal forest**.**

134. Shal Tree: Also spelled as Sal Tree (*Shorea robusta*), locally known as *Gazari* in Bengali, remains the cornerstone of the central and northern forest ecosystems in Bangladesh. It is the dominant species in the Bhawal National Park and the surrounding Gazipur district

135. LLB: Bachelor of Laws remains the primary academic qualification for pursuing a legal career in Bangladesh. Elaboration of the rootword in Latin is *Legis Legum Bechaleria.*

136. RCPSC: Rajendrapur Cantonment Public School & College

137. AGM: Assistant General Manager

138. Jatrabari Bus Stand: Is a major transportation hub known for its critical position and extreme crowdyness at the entry of South point of the capital, serving both inter-district and local bus services.

139. Chandona Chowrasta: The most important traffic intersection and commercial landmark in Gazipur. It serves as the primary gateway connecting northern Bangladesh to the capital, Dhaka.

140. CNG: Compressed Natural Gas, but as a vehicle, it is a common Bangladeshi idiom - "a CNG" refers to the three-wheeled auto-rickshaws that run on this fuel!

141. RP Gate Bazar: (Regimental Post Gate Bazar) is a prominent local market and transit point located in the Gazipur district, specifically serving the Rajendrapur Cantonment area.

142. DGFI: Directorate General of Forces Intelligence**,** the premier military intelligence agency of the Bangladesh Armed Forces.

143. BIRDEM: Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders, continues to be the country's premier healthcare institution for diabetes and endocrine research.

144. RMG: Ready-Made Garments, remains the backbone of the Bangladesh economy, accounting for over 80% of the country’s total export earnings. The Gazipur district, which you have been inquiring about, is the primary global hub for this industry.

145. BUTEX: Bangladesh University of Textiles, is the country's only specialized public university dedicated to textile engineering and is a cornerstone of the nation’s RMG sector.

146. COC: In the RMG Sector, "COC" is frequently used by HR and compliance officers, which means Code of Conduct.

146. BSCI: Business Social Compliance Initiative, is an industry-driven movement that aims to monitor and assess workplace standards across the global supply chain. It is not a certification but a monitoring system based on labor standards from the International Labour Organization (ILO).

147. Busbar: A busbar is a metallic bar or strip (typically made of Copper or Aluminum**)** that conducts electricity within a switchboard, distribution board, or substation. Unlike standard cables, busbars are rigid and can carry much higher currents.

148. CEO: Chief Executive Officer

149. Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

150. Eid remains a cornerstone of global cultural and religious life, celebrated by over 2 billion Muslims across the world.

151. DMC most commonly refers to Dhaka Medical College**,** the most prestigious and historic medical institution in Bangladesh.

152. OCD: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, is a recognized mental health condition characterized by a pattern of unwanted thoughts and fears (obsessions) that lead to repetitive behaviors (compulsions). The opposite of OCPD in negative sense.

153. Orgasmic Fluid: The forceful expulsion of a significant amount of fluid during the peak of sexual arousal or Orgasm is known as Female Ejaculation. In colloquial term many refer to this as Squirting.

154. Rakat: During Salah, a Rakat counted from Sanding, Ruku and Sitting.

155. Qiyam: Means standing and recite Surah Fatiha, the first Chapter of the Holy Quran.

156. Ruku: The bent position (L-like) in Salah.

157. Sujud: Lowering down the head to the ground and touching forehead during Slah.

158. Tashahud: The recitation of a Chapter during Slah.

159. Alaihis Salam: In Arabic "Peace Be Upon Him."

160. Dhaka Medical College: The highest prestigious Governmental medical academic institution in Bangladesh.

161. Placebo Effect: A phenomenon where a patient experiences a real improvement in their condition after receiving a "fake" treatment (like a sugar pill or sterile water injection) simply because they *expect* it to work.

162. Cocoons: The protective casings created by various insect larvae—continue to be an essential biological material, particularly within the textile, medical, and cosmetic industries of Bangladesh and the world.

163. Moths: Are recognized as vital components of the global ecosystem, serving as pollinators, food sources, and indicators of environmental health. While often overshadowed by butterflies, moths represent about 90% of the order *Lepidoptera*.

164. Quantum Method: is a widely recognized scientific process and self-development program in Bangladesh aimed at unleashing human potential through meditation and positive thinking.

165. Auto-suggestion: Is recognized as a psychological technique used to influence one's own subconscious mind through repetitive, positive statements.

166. North Bengal: In Bengali "Uttorbongo" refers to the northwestern geographical region of Bangladesh, primarily encompassing the Rangpur Division and Rajshahi Division. It is a region of immense strategic, agricultural, and historical importance.

167. Dighlapara: A posh locality, inhabited mostly by retired non-commissioned army officers and soldiers of Rajendrapur Cantonment, Gazipur.

168. Millitary Police: In short MP, serves as the law enforcement branch of the Bangladesh Armed Forces**,** ensuring discipline, security, and order within the military community and its installations.

169. Information Technology

170. Rajendrapur Cantonment Public School & College

171. Sixth Sense: Is understood both as a biological phenomenon (proprioception) and a psychological concept (intuition). In the context of the self-development programs, such as the Quantum Method, it is referred to as the "Extrasensory" power of the mind.

172. Highway: Often called expressways, motorways, or autobahns - are undergoing a global transformation, shifting from simple asphalt roads to "smart" infrastructure integrated with green technology and automation.

173. Lungi: The most popular and culturally significant traditional garment for men in Bangladesh. It is a seamless, tube-like sarong typically worn around the waist and reaching the ankles.

174. Paracetamol: Also known as acetaminophen, is the most widely used and trusted over-the-counter (OTC) medication for pain and fever relief in Bangladesh.

175. PCR: Polymerase Chain Reaction laboratories established during the COVID-19 pandemic remains a foundational part of Bangladesh's molecular diagnostic infrastructure.

176. Chandra: Also known as Chandra Chowrasta, is one of the most critical transportation and industrial hubs in Bangladesh. Located in the Kaliakair Upazila of Gazipur district, it serves as the ultimate gateway connecting the capital, Dhaka, to the Northern and Southwestern districts of the country.

177. PBUH: The most widely used English acronym for the Islamic honorific phrase "Peace Be Upon Him." The root is Arabic: *Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam*.

178. United Nations: The United Nations remains the primary international organization for maintaining global peace, security, and sustainable development. It currently consists of 193 Member States.

179. A Bengali popular name, means: Cool

180. Parag: A Bengali name, meaning in English is Pollen.

181. A posh clinical lab in Dhaka.

182. Prescription: Often abbreviated as Rx, is a legal document issued by a registered healthcare professional that authorizes a patient to be provided with a specific medicine or treatment.

183. Day of Judgement: In Arabic “Kiamah”, i.e. The Dooms Day.

184. Panic Attack: Is recognized as a sudden episode of intense fear that triggers severe physical reactions when there is no real danger or apparent cause. It is a common symptom associated with Panic Disorder and various anxiety conditions.

185. Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism: a critical voluntary supply-chain security program led by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP). For the thousands of Ready-Made Garment (RMG) factories in Gazipur, C-TPAT is a vital business requirement. Most major U.S. retailers (such as Walmart, Target, and Gap) mandate that their Bangladeshi suppliers comply with C-TPAT standards to ensure goods are not tampered with during the journey from the factory to the American consumer.

186. Doctor of Medicine: Is a post graduate medical and professional or research degree in the field of medicine, primarily qualifying the holder to practice as a physician. The specific nature and requirements of the degree vary significantly by country and jurisdiction.

187. World Health Organisation: is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) established in 1948 to direct and coordinate international public health.

188. Counseling: Within the field of psychotherapy refers to a collaborative "talking therapy" where a trained professional helps individuals find solutions to personal, emotional, or social difficulties.

189. Meditation: is a mind-body practice used to train attention and awareness, aiming for a mentally clear and emotionally stable state. Techniques: Common methods include focusing on the breath, repeating a mantra, or observing thoughts without reaction. Benefits: In 2026, it is widely recognized in both medical and secular settings for reducing stress, improving concentration, and potentially altering brain cell volume in areas responsible for fear (the amygdala). Scientific View: It is defined formally as a family of self-regulation practices that bring mental processes under voluntary control.

190. Perfectionist: Is defined in psychology as an individual who strives for flawlessness and sets excessively high performance standards, often accompanied by critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations.

191. Human Resource Management: has transitioned from a traditional administrative "back-office" function into a proactive strategic growth engine. It is defined as the strategic practice of organizing, coordinating, and managing an organization’s employees—often called human capital—to maximize productivity and effectively achieve long-term business goals.

192. Compliance: Is defined as the mandatory adherence to a set of laws, regulations, and ethical codes of conduct that govern the production process. It ensures that factories operate in a way that respects worker rights, guarantees physical safety, and minimizes environmental harm.

193. Fellowship of the College of Physicians and Surgeons: A higher level post graduate medical science degree.

194. Palli Bidyut: In Bengali, it means Rural Electricity –refers to the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB)**,** the country's largest power distribution organization responsible for providing electricity to rural areas.

195. Triggering Process: A rapid psychological and physiological reaction to a specific stimulus (a "trigger") that connects a present event to a past traumatic memory or emotional experience.

196. Roxana: A dentist and graduate doctor in Gazipur Agricultural University, and a kind hearted lady.

197. Tania Hasan: Is a recognized counselling psychologist and author in Bangladesh.

198. Client: Is an individual, couple, family, or group seeking professional help from a psychologist, counselor, or therapist.

199. Panic Attack: Is understood as an abrupt surge of intense fear or discomfort that reaches peak intensity within minutes. While terrifying, these episodes are not medically dangerous, though they often mimic life-threatening conditions like heart attacks.

200. Breathing Exercises: Are widely recognized as a way to potentially influence the autonomic nervous system. By consciously changing breathing patterns, it may be possible to signal the brain to shift from a "fight-or-flight" (sympathetic) response towards a more relaxed state (parasympathetic).

201. Jummah: The Friday congregational prayer and is considered the most sacred day of the week in Islam. The word originates from the Arabic root meaning "to gather" or "assembly".

202. Qaza: Or Qada, in Islamic jurisprudence refers primarily to the act of "making up" an obligatory act of worship—such as prayer or fasting—that was missed or not performed within its prescribed time.

203. Arginine: Specifically L-arginine, is a vital, multifaceted amino acid that serves as a fundamental building block for proteins and a crucial precursor for numerous essential biological molecules, most notably nitric oxide (NO). It is classified as a semi-essential or "conditionally essential" amino acid because while the body can synthesize it, dietary intake may be necessary during periods of stress, illness, or rapid growth.

204. Nitric Oxide: Scientific Symbol is NO, is a naturally occurring, short-lived, gaseous signaling molecule in the body that plays a crucial role in vital processes such as regulating blood flow (vasodilation), supporting the immune system, and acting as a neurotransmitter.

205. Molecule: At its simplest level, a molecule is a group of two or more atoms held together by chemical bonds. Think of atoms as individual LEGO bricks; a molecule is what you get when you snap those bricks together to create a specific structure.

206. Aloe Vera: Aloe vera is a succulent plant widely recognized for its extensive use in traditional medicine, cosmetics, and food industries due to the beneficial properties found in its gel and latex.

207. BNS Centre: Is a prominent multi-story commercial hub and landmark building located in Sector 7, Uttara**,** Dhaka. Situated directly on the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway, it is one of the oldest and most well-known business centers in the area.

208. Coaching Centre: In the context of Bangladesh (BD), a Coaching Centre refers to a private, commercial educational establishment that provides supplementary academic instruction outside of formal schooling or university hours. Bangladesh has numerous coaching centers catering to different educational needs, from university and job test preparation to English language proficiency. UCC, Mentors' and Saifur's are among the most well-known, each specializing in different areas.

209. Dopamine: Is defined as a catecholamine neurotransmitter and hormone that acts as the primary "reward signal" in the brain. It is essential for regulating motivation, pleasure, motor control, and executive function.

210. Ekushey Boimela: The Amar Ekushey Boi Mela (popularly known as the Ekushey Book Fair**)** is Bangladesh's most prestigious and largest annual literary festival. It is organized by the Bangla Academy and runs throughout the month of February to commemorate the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement.

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